

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY
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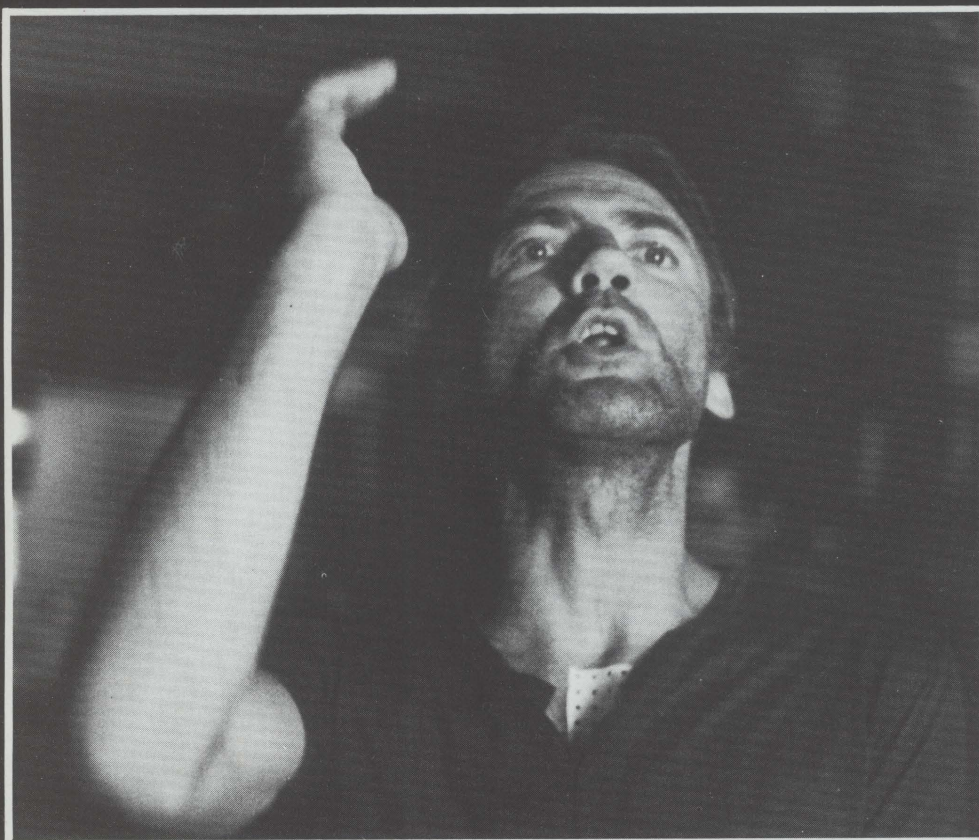
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Güney's

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with
Tuncel Kurtiz
Ayse Emel Mesci

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to another prison—REVOLT."
Yilmaz Güney

Cannes Film Festival 1983



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Tanner's
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WHITE
CITY**

with
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Teresa Madruga

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loves two women at the same
time."

Alain Tanner

Berlin Film Festival 1983

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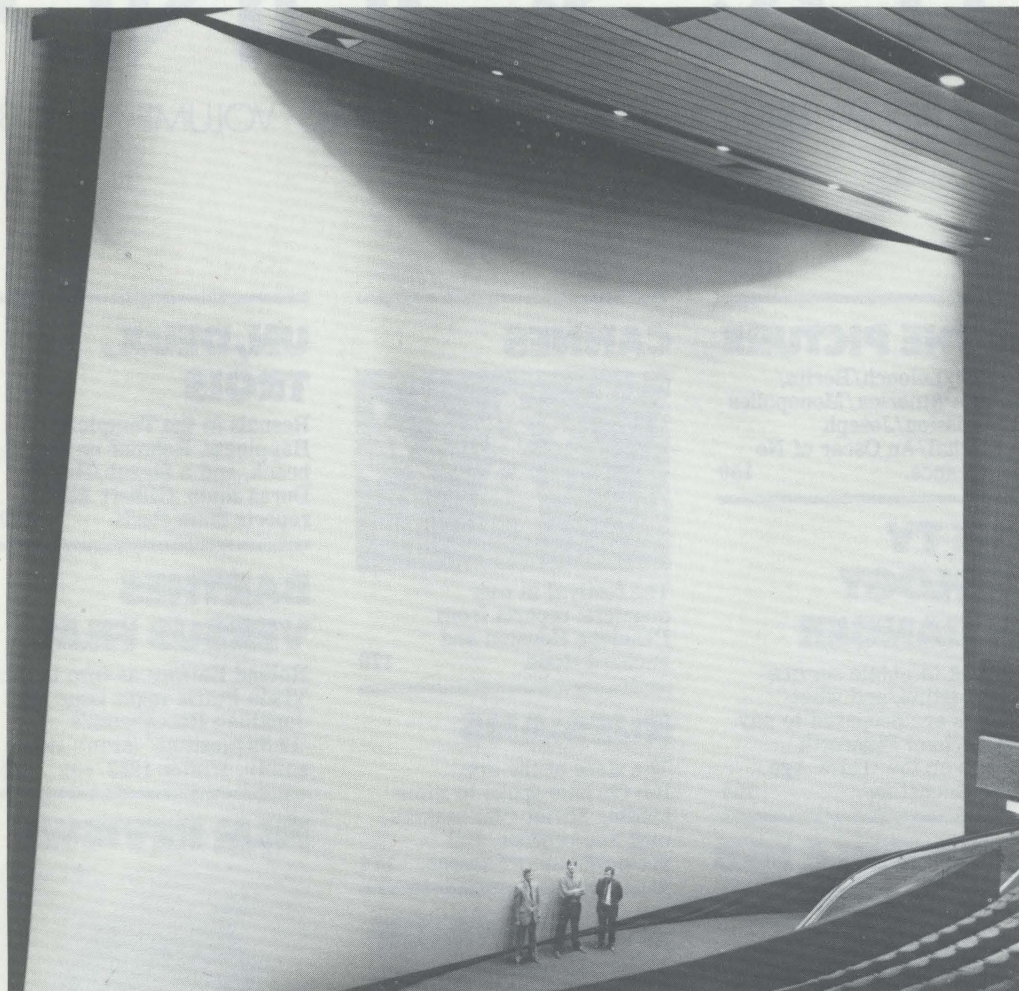
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The IMAX screen at Bradford.

To Fly!

A screen five storeys high...

An IMAX screening is not unlike a Christo happening. The artist Christo, it may be recalled, was last seen in Britain on a TV news item supervising the encirclement of a number of small islands with immense pink plastic sheets. IMAX, a Canadian projection system developed in the 70s, was inaugurated in Britain in June as the star attraction of the new National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford. The opening half-hour film, *To Fly!*, envelops the spectator. The screen—the largest in Britain—across which jets roar and hang gliders swoop is 45 foot high and 62 foot wide. 'I am six foot,' the museum's curator, Colin Ford, said with appropriate showmanship as he stood in the well of the steeply raked 320-seat auditorium. 'The screen behind me is five storeys high.'

Not since I watched *This is Cinerama* have I sat in a cinema feeling quite so queasy. 'The IMAX projector incorporates a special wide-angle Leitz lens and a powerful 4 kilowatt air-cooled xenon lamp,' reads the museum's

leaflet. The unique 'Rolling Loop' film movement advances the 70mm film horizontally through the projector, positioning each frame (1.91 inches by 2.74 inches) on fixed registration pins and holding it firmly on the rear element of the lens by vacuum. 'The 68 per cent shutter transmits one-third more light than the 50 per cent shutter used in conventional projectors.' The cost is some £250,000, and worth every penny to the Science Museum, of which the NMP is a branch, and the City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, the museum's co-sponsor, if the IMAX 'experience' proves as successful an audience draw as it has been elsewhere.

In terms of content, *To Fly!*, which was made as an American Bicentennial project by the aerial photographic team of Greg MacGillivray and James Freeman (*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*), is a rather dated mix of period dressing (high jinks with a top-hatted balloonist) and technological celebration (model work takes us into space). But when the opening small image expands to fill the screen, and the six-track sound swells, the impact is undeniable. Cinematic gimmicks from 3D to Odorama usually promise more than they deliver. Watching IMAX, however, or more properly

surrendering to it, one experiences something akin to the reaction of those bewildered early spectators who ducked at the approach of the silent locomotive.

Plans for the £10m National Museum of Photography, Film and Television were announced at the end of 1980. The curved, glass-fronted building, which is being rented from Bradford council at a peppercorn, was originally designed (though never used) as a replacement for the city's Alhambra Theatre. The museum will open its first six galleries in the course of the summer and should be fully functional by the end of 1984. It aims to give a compendious account of all aspects of photography; and, as in Kensington's Science Museum, there will be buttons to push and knobs to pull for children of all ages.

To reach the IMAX theatre, which is also equipped for screening video and conventional films, visitors will pass through a cinema section. 'Here they will be invited to share the pioneers' quest for realism, exploring with them the phenomena of motion, persistence of vision, 3D and sound.' The story of a British movie in production will also be detailed. Perhaps, one hopes, a film which has blossomed in the British Renaissance?

JOHN PYM

Lelouch

In London for 'Edith et Marcel', Lelouch talks of playback and provocation

Seventeen years and as many films later, *A Man and a Woman*, epitome of 60s unradical chic, remains the movie with which Claude Lelouch is most readily associated. And if that is substantially thanks to the contribution of Francis Lai's music, Lelouch might well consider it appropriate. In London recently for a gala screening of his latest film, the lavish Piaf biopic *Edith et Marcel*, in which Lai makes a 'guest star' appearance as a café accordionist, Lelouch proved eager during an interview to emphasise the closeness of his working relationship with his constant composer.

'Francis and I are real fellow creators. I don't show him exposed film, I just tell him the story. And I ask him for themes, not music to link with the images. The music is taped beforehand and whenever possible it is played on the set, as with a silent movie. The actors key their performances to the music, though not in the sense of improvising.' He says that some three-quarters of the three-hour *Les Uns et les Autres* (1980) was filmed by this playback method, but admits it can make editing more than usually protracted: cutting of *Edith et Marcel* took six months.

Lelouch, a youthful-looking 45, can be given to high-flying generalities about the nature of the cinema ('Watching is a kind of cowardice; I want to provoke the spectator') and his own contribution to it; he was heard to suggest during his NFT Guardian Lecture that he deserved to be awarded the Nobel peace prize. But he clearly relishes the practical business of film-making. Initially trained as a newsreel cameraman, he still acts (sometimes uncredited) as his own cinematographer. He describes making 14 takes of an elaborate travelling shot in a crowded railway station for *Edith et Marcel*, and talks of setting up crowd scenes and the way these can act upon an audience: 'The crowd on the screen becomes a kind of reflection of the spectators in the theatre.'

Given the importance he attaches to music, had he considered making a musical? 'I dream of doing that, but I need to find some completely new approach to filming singing and dancing.' The experiment of *One from the Heart* is mentioned. 'Coppola is a great director of narrative films like *The Godfather*, but not so good when it comes to experiment. There's no point to *One from the Heart*: it's like trying to remake *Singin' in*

the *Rain* without even having Gene Kelly.'

Lelouch is inclined to be a bit sniffy about narrative. Asked about *Gone With the Wind*, since the subplot of *Edith et Marcel* refers to it extensively, he says, 'It's the greatest B movie ever made, but I like A movies.' His nomination of his favourite film proves surprising: Kalatozov's 1957 'thaw' movie *The Cranes Are Flying*. 'Not for the content, you understand. For the cinematic writing.'

TIM PULLEINE

Berlin

Chris Marker, Robbe-Grillet, Chantal Akerman, Edwin S. Porter ...

In the context of this year's competition at Berlin, the awarding of a (shared) Golden Bear to Edward Bennett's *Ascendancy* made perfect sense. What was being rewarded was an attempt to tackle a Serious Issue (Northern Ireland) in an accessible form on a clearly limited budget; for the jury, the political message could be easily grasped and the sense of economy admired. Other entries, in sharp contrast, seemed to be flaunting a stylish, overbudgeted vacuity. Prime offenders in this area were Daniel Schmid's *Hécate* and Vadim Glowna's *Dies rigoroze Leben*. Both featured displaced European passions (a French diplomat's affair in Morocco; sex and murder among German émigrés in the American desert) but seemed to lack even the courage of their own camp convictions; the ghosts of, respectively, von Sternberg and Edward Hopper should be restless. More dispiriting, because of higher expectations, was Margarethe von Trotta's *Heller Wahn*. Here, a 'feminist' relationship between Hanna Schygulla's lecturer in literature and Angela Winkler's sensitive artist was reduced to a glossy game of look (glances across stripped pine floors) but never touch.

Thankfully, women directors took their revenge elsewhere. In the Information Section, Chantal Akerman's *Toute une Nuit* leapt with a jokey vengeance across the divide between the avant-garde and narrative. The emotional highlights and climaxes of innumerable stories were shown during the course of a beautifully paced night in Brussels. Couple after couple fell into each other's arms or said their farewells, with no screen time allowed for whatever might frame these desperate moments. In the Young Forum, Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* met with a rapturous reception. Wearing its cheapness with pride, this punkish, feminist science-fiction saga has women, dissatisfied with their place in a future,

post-revolutionary American society, rising up in armed revolt against their male oppressors. The audience's enthusiasm, encouraged by a driving music track, seemed wholly justified, but was strangely transmuted in the post-screening discussion. Questions like 'Why are there not more Third World women in your film?' seemed rather alien to the movie's cut-price anarchic spirit.

The Information Section included two other examples of work from the New York intersection of punk and avant-garde. *Liquid Sky*, by Russian émigré Slava Tsukerman (a former student of Lev Kuleshov's), also incorporated a science-fiction slant in its view of Manhattan's young fashion-and-drugs decadents, with the heroine's lovers being spirited away by a small alien spacecraft which lands on her roof. The film's neon-bedecked surface was initially striking but couldn't ultimately compensate for pretension and posturing. Much more substantial was Michael Oblowitz's *King Blank*, which charts the terminal decline of a savagely destructive relationship. The bleak landscape of bars, highways and motel rooms is appropriately rendered in superb black and white, but equal care has been paid to the dense weave of the soundtrack. The sense of the characters trapped in the constructions of their male/female sexuality is as sharply funny as it is scabrous.

Given the presence of these films, it was appropriate that the Market offered a first showing of Robert Faenza's *Cop Killer* (a.k.a. *Moment of Death*), which pairs John Lydon (formerly the Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten) and Harvey Keitel. Essentially, it's a roles-reversed reworking of *Performance*, with Lydon (himself an almost retired rock star) invading

the world of detective Keitel, all neatness and repression à la James Fox. The core of the narrative is the intense, violent and enclosed relationship which results, but its force is somewhat dissipated by the weakly handled surrounding plot, involving a series of murders of New York narcotics agents. A case of being struck by the film that could have been, and by Lydon's difficulty in accommodating his powerfully camera-conscious presence within a character part.

Two other items of note were based, in their very different ways, on pre-existing images. In the competition, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Belle Captive* is worth mentioning simply as the director's first film since 1975. Magritte provides the title and visual inspiration but the narrative web of dream/fiction and fetishistic imagery was undoubtedly the author's own. Nothing really that Robbe-Grillet hasn't delivered before (apart from the use of video as a further image-within-the-image) and, with its pleasing denial of any Issue as such to be grasped, not a hope of a prize. The Forum offered *Before the Nickelodeon*, Charles Musser's excellent documentary on Edwin S. Porter. Porter's career is traced, using his films plus voice-over, sound effects and tinted photographs, very much within the developing institution of American narrative cinema, up to approximately 1910. The interest in an individual as pioneer/artist is consistently balanced by an attention to the wider context (increased number of shots per film, for example, as a factor in shifting control of form from the showman to the producer) and the result is a very useful addition to the current growing interest in early cinema.

Also shown out of competition,

and hovering on the edge of documentary, was the festival's real highlight. Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* is a remarkable essay on film, memory and the survival of cultures (primarily here Japanese and African), which ranges from a concise 'remake' of *Vertigo*, using stills and revisited/refilmed locations, to a Japanese video artist's electronic assaults on the world's image. Impossible to account for satisfactorily here, it marked Berlin's real point of ascendancy this year.

STEVE JENKINS

Leone's America

A gangsters' fairy tale with Max and Noodles

C'era una Volta in America (*Once Upon a Time in America*) is the first film the 'Father of the Spaghetti Western', Sergio Leone, has made in ten years. It is the culmination of ten years' frustrated labour and secrecy surrounds the shooting in Rome, Venice, New York, Toronto and Paris with an international cast including Robert De Niro, James Woods, Treat Williams and Elizabeth McGovern.

The Italian magazine *Gente* recently published a dramatic sequence of photographs of De Niro, clad in leather jacket and mafioso cap and wearing dark glasses, grabbing a camera from a local photographer in the centre of Rome and trying to tear out the film. There have been the inevitable sanctioned press leaks, however, which recount how the project began in 1973 when Leone tried to acquire the film rights for a little-known American book titled *The Hoods*, by one Harry Gray, who turned out to be an ex-New York Jewish gangster called Goldberg who had attempted to tell the truth about the world of gangsterism.

Leone visited Goldberg and, after a battle with American producers, acquired the rights to the book and set about looking for a producer and writing a screenplay with Norman Mailer. The Italian producer Alberto Grimaldi expressed an interest but pulled out when the budget soared to around \$30m; meanwhile, the screenplay had gone through several rewrites by different hands. 'Ten years is a really long time,' Leone admits, 'and I often had other interesting offers, tempting stories and ambitious projects, but my laziness about starting to think about another project was stronger than the temptation to carry it out.' Finally, Arnon Milchan, the 34-year-old Israeli producer of Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy*, stepped in with \$25m and *Once Upon a Time in*



'Before the Nickelodeon'.

IN THE PICTURE

America was at last under way.

The movie follows two Jewish gangsters, the romantic anarchist Noodles (De Niro) and the cynical power-hungry Max (Woods), in New York and elsewhere from the 1920s to 1968. 'There's always something of myself in my stories,' Leone says. 'But I think these men, rather than expressing two different personalities, are like occasionally discordant aspects of the same character. It's like separating the fundamental aspects of a man's nature with a hatchet blow and attributing them to different people, and then making them flow together into one story so they can clash, struggle, consolidate and then separate again.'

The story begins in an opium den, reconstructed at Cinecittà, and then moves to a 1930s Jewish quarter, built in Pietralata, in which Max and Noodles are seen as Bronx kids. Filming later shifted to Brooklyn, the Excelsior Hotel in Venice (where a ballroom scene was shot just before last year's festival), and then on to Toronto and Paris, over a period of nine months. Now Leone is searching for a location—probably in Hong Kong—suitable for a brief final sequence in 30s Chinatown. Meanwhile the budget has risen to \$51m. 'This corresponds to the cost of a rather above average American film,' Leone says. 'It's nowhere near being a record.'

Leone regards the film as the completion of a trilogy about America which began with *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *Duck, You Sucker* (or, as it was retitled by the US distributors, *A Fistful of Dynamite*). An 'epic' film, but unlike the world of Coppola's *Godfather*: 'His characters have little in common with mine, and his situations are different, even though his contexts and environments are similar. It's a case of totally different motivations. The gangster substance of my characters is only a pretext for a fairy tale, a story about friendship. Although there's a careful reconstruction of historical environments in the film, it's basically a fairy story. De Niro has always been emblematic of realistic or even hyper-realistic cinema, and the way he and I have adapted to our reciprocal needs and personalities is exactly that something new which made me want all the more to have him in the leading role.'

Thirty-seven hours of film have already been exposed, with up to 50 takes for some scenes. A camera operator recounted how, in a scene in which Noodles is woken by an alarm clock, De Niro asked for a different sounding alarm for every take in order to keep an element of surprise. De Niro's make-up was supervised by Chris Tucker, who was responsible for

John Hurt's features in *The Elephant Man*. 'I've always wanted to show just one thing in my films,' Leone says, 'that good goes hand in hand with evil, and that we love Abel only because there is a Cain.' Why did he choose to end the film in 1968? '1968 signalled a clear step forward for more than one generation. It was like suddenly ageing in the face of a world which had changed overnight, rejected the old values, and was literally bubbling with emerging emotion. This makes it an ideal time to close a parable which deals with men of the older generation.'

Despite the American focus of the film, and the recent surge in the popularity of Italian films in the US by 'second order' directors like the Taviani brothers, Rosi and Bellocchio, Leone remains steadfastly Italian in his approach and refused to join the Directors' Guild of America when it was proposed to him. 'I'm neither a judge, nor a critic, nor a moralist. How could I be? I'm not American, I'm not Jewish and I'm no more of a gangster than most of my colleagues.' Leone's approach to America, and his comparison between film directors and gangsters, brings Wim Wenders to mind, and both share a paradoxical love for American cinema while maintaining an essentially European detachment.

As Leone puts it, 'My America is that of a European attracted to a country of dreams. My standpoint is one of looking at, examining, scrutinising, while remaining attracted, involved, frightened, repelled and enchanted. The America of Kennedy and Martin Luther King, of Lucky Luciano and Jimmy Hoffa, racism, industrial waste and energy research, 'No Nukes' and Steinbeck, *Playboy*, Griffith and Spielberg, exploitation and idealism, the West, the War, the musicals, the jazz and the criminals, and an infinity of other violent and explosive contradictions which make it a unique nation. In a way, Noodles and Max are all of this.'

TONY MITCHELL

Monopolies Report

'Operating against the public interest ...'

Ironically, the appearance in May of the long-delayed Monopolies Commission Report on the Supply of Films for Exhibition in Cinemas coincided almost exactly with the realisation that a general election would postpone indefinitely Iain Sproat's anxiously awaited review of government film policy. With Quota already

suspended and the fate of the Eady Levy hanging in the balance, the Commission's main conclusion that little should or could be done to reform a declining industry understandably excited little interest. 'Too little and too late,' was the weary response from both film-makers and industry-watchers.

Like its predecessor in 1966, the Report was bound by its terms of reference to take a conservative view. From a strictly business point of view, there is indeed little scope for manoeuvre in an industry that seems incapable of attracting significant investment or management initiative to avert its accelerating collapse. What the Commission found was a growing concentration of distribution interests—with three major conglomerates (Columbia-EMI-Warner, United International Pictures and UK Film Distributors), together with three 'minor majors', accounting for 90 per cent of all film rental income—now firmly locked into a system of 'alignments' with the two major exhibition circuits, EMI and Rank. There is no doubt that 'the alignments operate and may be expected to operate against the public interest', but what to do?

Unlike the Bredin Commission in France, which found an unhealthy concentration of interests in Gaumont-Pathé and has just succeeded in prising the two circuits apart, the Monopolies Commission believes it impracticable to create an effective competitor for EMI and Rank by forcing them to divest themselves of cinemas. Its recommendations are limited to ending the system of 'bars' and restricting the length of exclusive first-runs outside London's West End—two sensible though perhaps largely symbolic measures which may prove as impractical as they will be ineffective in substantially helping independent exhibitors, without a government-backed development policy to help the cinema find its place in the multi-media future.

For what the Report shows clearly is that the British distribution and exhibition industry is trapped in a spiral of decline. The closure of fully half the cinemas that were operating in 1966 has meant that 'more and more people have to travel further to go to the cinema' and many more have simply given up; while often substandard mini-cinema conversions have made it 'more difficult to reproduce the sound and visual effects for some films which the makers intended to achieve.'

More significantly, admission prices have risen more sharply in Britain (31 per cent in real terms between 1970–81) than in either Western Europe as a whole or the United States. Together with some discreet detective work which proves that the notorious

delays in provincial releases of popular films are *not* due to print shortages (many prints in fact remain idle), there is a strong implication running through the Report that the industry is simply hiding its head in the sand. Raising seat prices to compensate for falling attendances, closing cinemas when even cheap conversions haven't worked, eliminating competition through 'alignments' and hallowed custom—all these are easier in the short term than undertaking the major reconstruction of cinema that has taken place in the United States and, with the backing of governments of all hues, throughout much of Europe.

The BFI's submission to the Commission argued that many current anomalies and missed opportunities in the film supply system stemmed from a failure to understand the changes in the cinema audience and develop a flexibility to cater for its increasing specialisation. To expect the distribution and exhibition 'majors' to acquire this flexibility and foresight of their own accord, under constant pressure from parent companies to improve their near-non-existent profitability, must be pie in the sky until there is a serious government initiative to create a favourable climate for the cinema.

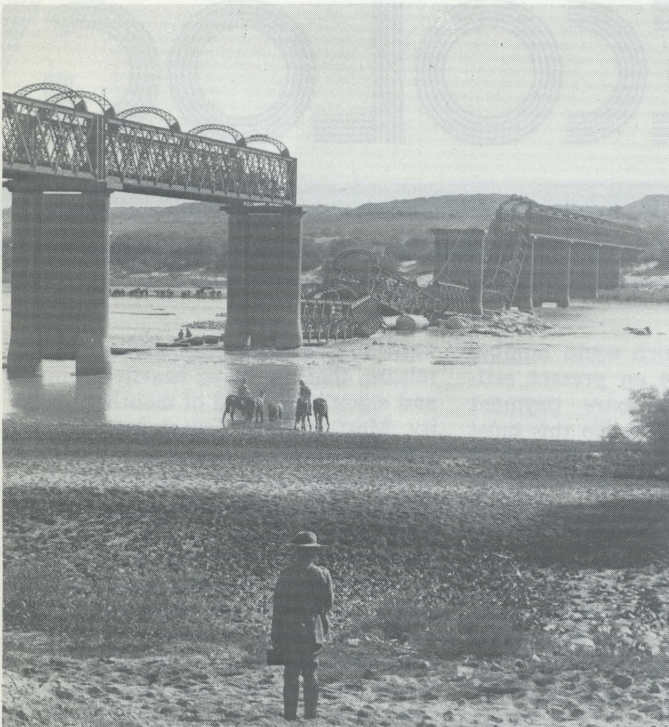
IAN CHRISTIE

Joseph Rosenthal

New light on a pioneer cameraman

A trunk has recently come to light in the British Film Institute's premises at Aston Clinton containing many glass negatives taken by the pioneer cameraman Joseph Rosenthal (1864–1946). From a first examination, it appears that the find, which includes a quantity of documents and ephemera, is of importance both for the high quality of the photographs and their content, principally scenes from the Boer and Russo-Japanese wars, and for the light they will shed on Rosenthal's little-known life. Up to now, Rosenthal has been recognised as the most audacious of early cameramen; this discovery reveals him also to have been an accomplished stills photographer.

Like the Lumière operators, Rosenthal travelled the world in search of subjects for his Bioscope camera; but unlike the Lumière men, who remained virtually anonymous, Rosenthal was famous in his own right. He first caught the public eye with his films of the Boer War. From the outset he wanted to film real fighting, and as a result frequently faced danger: he was shelled, had



Rosenthal's Boer War: Colenso Bridge.

a horse killed under him and was almost taken prisoner when he entered Pretoria ahead of the British Army. He covered the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900, the Philippines the following year and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. In the latter, Russian shelling was so intense that Rosenthal was compelled to use a bullet-proof shield for his camera. 'Once a fragment from an unexploded shell hit the shield within an inch of my eye-hole, knocking myself, camera and shield over in a heap.'

But Rosenthal also covered more peaceful assignments: the Royal Tours to Australia in 1901 and India in 1906. He filmed, too, for the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1908, Rosenthal started his own film company in Croydon, but his activities after this have up to now been obscure. A book is planned on Joseph Rosenthal and an exhibition of his newly discovered stills scheduled for the autumn at the Photographers' Gallery in London.

STEPHEN BOTTOMORE

Posterity

An Oscar of No Importance

A prize may be won without the recipient ever benefiting from its attendant prestige because, precisely by virtue of his having won it, that prestige is immediately forfeit. And when it occurs too often, the prize loses not only its value but its significance. It is posterity, not the Hollywood Academy, which confers the only Oscars that count, as Jean Cocteau seemed to imply in a little-known prose poem published in his collection *Appogiatures* in 1953. It was called *Oscar*:

"I've got the Oscar." So the realistic film asserted. It considered itself surrealistic and even opportunistic with regard to some invisible tribunal before which it was in due course to appear except that it did not know where. This tribunal was widely feared even though the informed sources who spoke of it neither knew nor

could imagine of what it was composed. The Oscar would not carry much weight with its judges, the area of whose jurisprudence the realistic or surrealistic or opportunistic film sought to discover. It became confused, wound up as it was inside cans where it digested the Oscar, like that dark-skinned snake in a film (a documentary, as it happens) swallowing a lighter-skinned snake of which, I remember, all that one could see was its smooth, flat head silently screaming for help. It did not know whether it would be to its advantage or disadvantage to wait. It wondered just how long they might keep it waiting. Or whether it was to be judged in a world for which its cans had no more importance than a can of preserves. Bitterly, it would repeat under its breath: "*The Oscar. The Oscar. I've got the Oscar.*" And it thought of that famous Oscar, of that cadaverous Oscar over which, all alone, a Pre-Raphaelite Muse stood guard in a wretched hotel room on the Left Bank.'

GILBERT ADAIR

Artificial Eye

NEW TITLES

Werner Herzog's
FITZCARRALDO

Wim Wenders'
HAMMETT

Yilmaz Güney's
YOL

Michelangelo Antonioni's
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Ingmar Bergman's
FANNY AND ALEXANDER

Francis Coppola's
ONE FROM THE HEART

Robert Bresson's
L'ARGENT

Hans Jürgen Syberberg's
PARSIFAL

Jean-Luc Godard's
PASSION

Wim Wenders'
THE STATE OF THINGS

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THE TV ECOLOGY

The Government's White Paper on Cable Television, published in April this year, marks the beginning of a new era of broadcasting policy-making in Britain. Ostensibly, it sets out the framework for a regulatory environment for cable television. But the discussion document also makes it clear that the regulatory approach to broadcasting as a whole has shifted radically from the principles underlying 'public service broadcasting'. Presumably Mrs Thatcher's new government will apply to broadcasting the same broad philosophy of privatisation and market forces that it applies to industry and the economy. But will the free market deliver what British audiences actually want? There are growing fears that not only will a deregulated broadcasting environment fail to deliver the exciting new range of channels of entertainment, but that it may also irreparably damage the existing ecology of broadcasting.

The 'Television of Abundance' that is about to descend on us all will, we are told, provide us with 30 channels on cable, five direct-broadcast satellite channels, nationwide availability of video-cassettes at £1 per hire for feature films, and a VCR penetration of perhaps 50 per cent of TV homes. In the late 80s viewers will have far more viewing choices available to them. And many people seem to want more choice. This apparently irrational urge to become one's own programme controller is confirmed by the astonishing growth of VCR use in Britain. Now at least 16 per cent of homes have them, for a monthly rental of £14-£22. What can persuade people to pay such sums when, from research evidence, the VCRs are used primarily to time-shift programmes, or to record one programme while another is being watched? In other words, they are being used primarily as rescheduling devices, rather than as sources of new entertainment.

There are two lessons to be learned here. The first is that viewers in Britain, far from simply avoiding the worst programmes each evening, are very often actively seeking out particular programmes. The second lesson is that some British TV viewers are prepared to spend twice as much as they already pay (£14 per month, made up of the cost of the licence fee plus rental) in order to watch their favourite programmes at unscheduled times, uninterrupted by boring programmes.

For VCR homes, which could number seven million by 1984 on present estimates, the minimum extra payment (rental) per month is £14. To this must be added the cost of blank tapes at £7 each. Although few VCR households buy pre-recorded tapes, two-thirds rent them, at rates ranging from 30p to £3 for two days' hire. They can be hired from pubs, garages, grocers' shops and laundrettes, or in many cases actually delivered to the door and collected after use. Most tapes are pirated, and 25 per cent of them are soft porn films. VCR-owning households are characterised by high levels of disposable income, and while most are in the AB socio-economic groups, it is clear that C1 and C2 households are joining in the video boom. Multiple income families in rented accommodation often enjoy very high levels of discretionary spending. And most families with children appear

How much are British viewers prepared to pay for more TV choice?

to be willing to pay more for more TV choice.

It is the discovery of this latent discretionary leisure spending that is one of the two driving forces behind what Brian Wenham has called 'The Third Age of Broadcasting'. The other is suppressed demand for recent, uncut feature films. The figures for UK cinema admissions tell their own story. At the height of the cinema age in 1946 there were 30 million admissions a week. Now there are only 1.6 million a week. But the breakdown of the figures is more revealing. The vast majority of cinema admissions now are accounted for by the 16-35 age group. The average adult over 35 in Great Britain visits the cinema just *once* a year. The main reason for this is financial. For a family of four, a visit to a city-centre cinema (if one is within reasonable travelling distance) will usually cost in the region of £20. The financial disincentive is powerful.

But the demand is still strong. People

want to see films that are on current release, that are being heavily promoted and enjoy high 'word of mouth' popularity. Most of these (apart from the soft porn films) will of course find their way in due course on to the free TV schedules, which is where most people will continue to see feature films. But that will take at least three years. And for a section of the TV audience, it is clear that they are willing to pay to see them earlier. The value for money equation is, after all, computed against the cost of a visit to the cinema, rather than against a three year delay. And of course some of the films (the soft and hard core pornography and the extremely violent films) may never receive a television showing. Relays of sporting and cultural events (e.g. opera) may also find a paying audience, perhaps through pay-per-view technology (PPV).

The demand, then, is evident. The supply is adequate. What is missing are delivery systems *to the home*, and revenue collection facilities direct from the subscriber. At present the video market is providing distribution and straightforward revenue collection. It is, however, a very inefficient system. It is offsetting its inherent inefficiency through piracy. The cost per unit of the distribution medium (blank tapes, cost of recording, cost of packaging and distribution, wholesale and retail margins) is about £15. This is far higher than the cost of cable and satellite delivery. But even these systems are very expensive.

The cost per household connected to a new cable system is about £700, amortised over eight years (£5 per month). A premium film service can be offered for about £8 per month. That is twice as expensive as the only successful US pay channel, Home Box Office (HBO); but HBO somehow negotiated a never to be repeated deal with the Hollywood studios that gave it access to major films at bargain basement prices. The total for cable delivery in the UK, then, is a rather high £13-£20 per month (at least £8 for the films, at least £5 for basic services such as old TV shows, imported material, news channels, local channels and rock music channels). This has to be *added* to the cost of a VCR machine, which will in most homes be the first optional addition to television entertainment. This, more than any other factor, accounts for the low penetration of pay movie services in the UK cable experiments (at present,

IN DANGER

Michael Pilsworth

around 17 per cent of homes on cable choose to pay extra for film channels).

Most efficient of all the delivery systems is satellite television, for this system employs (in non-cabled areas) the well-proven formula of off-loading the cost of the reception technology on to the consumer (in the same way that broadcast television reception technology has been paid for privately by TV viewers). The cost to the distributor is limited therefore to the cost of the delivery system. For a direct broadcast satellite, this is in the region of £12m a year. For comparison, a terrestrial network in the UK costs £30m per year to operate (recurrent costs and depreciation). Direct satellite broadcasts also reach the parts that cable can't (and never will) reach—the rural areas and the inner cities. For the subscriber, the cost will be in the region of £10 per month rental for the reception technology (aerial and decoder) and a further £8 per month for the premium service. Again, one has to assume that this extra charge of £18 will in most cases have to be added to the cost of a VCR machine.

The customers for these services will be stratified on the basis of what they are prepared to pay for their television-delivered entertainment at home. The high spenders, those willing to part with around £60 per month for their television, will be able to tune in to the four terrestrial channels, their VCR machines, basic cable channels, a premium cable channel and a satellite premium channel. On present research evidence, only a small proportion, perhaps 5 or 6 per cent of the audience, will indulge themselves in this way. A larger group will pay for the terrestrial channels, a VCR machine and either a satellite or cable delivered premium service for a total of £42 per month. As much as 25 per cent of the audience seems to be ready to opt for this pattern of television viewing. Another group will get only the four terrestrial channels and a choice of movies on demand from their VCR machines for around £28 per month (plus the rental of the films at, say, £1 a time). Twenty-five per cent of the audience seem to be prepared to pay this much. And the rest, the remaining 45 per cent, will still have their four 'free' terrestrial channels for only £14 per month.

These survey indications might seem to suggest that there is a great deal of money for programme-makers and film-

makers in cable and satellite channels. It is true that the new money which might be added to the TV and cinema system through pay-TV could in the long term be as much as one or two billion pounds a year (assuming that 6 million of the 20 million TV homes in this country pay a total of around £20 a month). Only part of that £20 per home, however, will ever reach the programme-makers. The delivery systems (satellite and cable) are expensive. The first call on this new money will be for capital and recurrent expenditure on these delivery systems. On the basis of cable experience in the USA, programme-makers can expect to receive 50 per cent of what the cable operator charges for the premium film services. As homes in the UK seem to be unwilling to spend much more than £8 per month for these, the return to programme-makers might be no more

How many of us
might pay
£60 a month—
and for what?

than £288m per year. This is hardly a great new dawn. What it means is that, even on the most optimistic estimates, the money available for programming from new cable and satellite channels will be no more than twice what it currently costs to run Channel 4.

So these new channels will not be able to afford to produce many new films or programmes; they simply will not have enough money. Ever. They will have to buy cheap foreign programming, and will rely almost exclusively on feature films and sport to attract the paying customers. They will probably never be able to fund high quality television production. However, although they will not attract mass audiences, they will attract very significant sections of the mass audience.

The premium cable and satellite services will siphon off from the broadcast channels those viewers who are interested in feature films, soft porn and sport, and who are prepared to pay to watch them. These viewers will tend to be members of

larger families with high levels of discretionary leisure spending; they will tend to be younger, and be in highly paid skilled manual jobs or the professions. These groups are all prime targets for television advertisers, and so they will be harder to reach when these services become available (unless advertising is extended to them, as will probably happen). Additionally, the cost of feature films and of some events, notably sport, will rise as competition increases. But possibly the most serious impact on free TV will be the devaluation, in ratings terms, of feature films.

A pay-movie channel has to be able to offer at least one major new feature film each week for it to be an attractive marketing proposition: 52 films per year. Bearing in mind that only 140 features per year are made in the English language, of which perhaps fifteen to twenty could be described as major attractions, the central problem becomes clear. In all likelihood there will be room for two pay-movie channels in the UK, limited not by *income* (though this may be a problem as well) but by availability of product. Similarly, there may be enough sports material to fill one or two channels, but not more.

These premium channels will probably operate round the clock with a heavy repeats pattern. Each film is repeated ten times over six months, saturating the audience. Many of the films are old (there simply aren't enough new films to fill the schedules) and may even have been seen already on television. Free television, without the 'lift' in the ratings that feature films regularly provide, will find that these are no longer a reliable and cheap staple in the schedules. They may even become a liability. In the week before Christmas 1982, the BBC showed 24 feature films; ITV showed 27. It isn't hard to imagine the impact on the 'free' channels of a marked decline in the ratings value of this amount of material.

The prospect of a decline in the audiences for BBC and ITV does not appear to worry the government. This is because the free market principle dictates that cable channels should compete directly with broadcast television channels. But there seems to have been very little serious consideration of the impact that even quite a small reduction in the overall audience for ITV and the BBC will have, in a situation where audiences are

free to watch competing commercial channels.

First, advertising time on commercial television is sold to advertisers on the basis of a system that is rather like an auction: a bidder can have a particular time-slot simply by offering more money than the previous bidder. As there is a fixed supply (air-time) and a high and variable degree of demand, prices tend to remain high. Even so, advertising revenue has broadly kept pace with the production costs of the companies, and the advertising 'pound' still buys roughly the same amount of air-time as it did ten years ago. But this system will come to an end if new satellite and cable channels start to sell advertising in competition with ITV. The demand may remain the same but the supply of air-time will expand: the auction effect will disappear, and prices will fall. This fall in revenue has to be added to the fall in revenue resulting from lower ratings (because of competition).

For most ITV companies, this fall in revenue will have a serious knock-on effect. When ITV companies make excess profits they are subject to an exchequer levy. As programme production costs may be set against the levy, the making of certain types of expensive high quality productions, such as *Brideshead Revisited*, becomes possible where they would not otherwise be viable. If companies cease to pay the levy, then the real cost

of making programmes like these increases dramatically. Faced with the prospect of declining income and rising costs in ITV, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, charged with supervising the commercial television companies in Britain, would have to act to protect the commercial viability of the companies under its tutelage: it would relax its rules. Fewer resources would be devoted to serious programmes, News at Ten might be shifted out of its present slot, the 'God-slot' abandoned, and serious networked programmes such as *World in Action* or *TV Eye* moved out of peak time. Local programme-making requirements would be watered down. And the BBC, faced with these changes, would have to respond.

As more resources are ploughed by the broadcasters into films and acquired programming, and as the schedules are emptied of any programmes that might offend mass tastes, the fledgling cable and satellite channels would also begin to cry for help. The new Cable Television Authority (CTA), to be set up by the government under the terms of the White Paper, will look to its own; it will be charged with this task. It would be inconceivable to expect it to preside over the demise of its own offspring. So the IBA, the CTA and the BBC, to say nothing of any further bodies that might regulate satellite channels, will drag each other into the marketplace.

The sophisticated subsidy for programmes aimed at minority tastes that was spawned by, and currently feeds upon, the surpluses created by the application of monopolies to television finance would soon begin to collapse. The BBC's monopoly of licence revenue (an effective form of pay-TV), and ITV's monopoly of the sale of air-time (including, now, that for Channel 4), have given to the BBC's Board of Governors and to the IBA powers that they have used to great effect. The IBA in particular, since the Pilkington Report in 1964, has used the lure of healthy profits made by the ITV companies as a means of enforcing its writ. ITV franchises were valuable, and so arduous conditions could be attached to their allocation. In a free market future, with franchises worth less, those conditions are certain to be relaxed.

Unless Parliament begins to consider seriously the wider implications of the deregulation of British broadcasting, the lure of a Utopian future, to be delivered by cable and satellite, may bring about the end of the financial arrangements that provide the very programmes which most people like but now take for granted: high quality, British-made programmes that are distinctive. Now they are the envy of the world. To be sure, there are few programmes that fall into this category. But if the present policies remain unchanged, there will be fewer still. ■

"Humphrey Jennings was brilliant, absolutely brilliant, the Renaissance Man of his Cambridge generation." William Feaver, OBSERVER

HUMPHREY JENNINGS

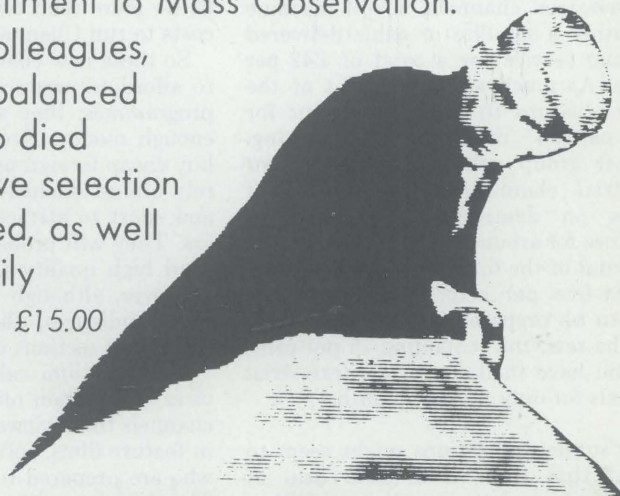
More Than a Maker of Films

Anthony W. Hodgkinson and Rodney E. Sheratsky
Foreword by Roger Manvell

In this new book on Jennings, "the pre-eminent creative presence in British film culture" according to *The Guardian*, the authors analyse all his films and review his paintings, poetry and commitment to Mass Observation. They interviewed many of Jennings' colleagues, associates, and friends, and present a balanced portrait of an ardent, creative man who died young and unresolved. A comprehensive selection of photographs from the films is included, as well as detailed descriptions of films not easily obtained and a complete list of credits. £15.00

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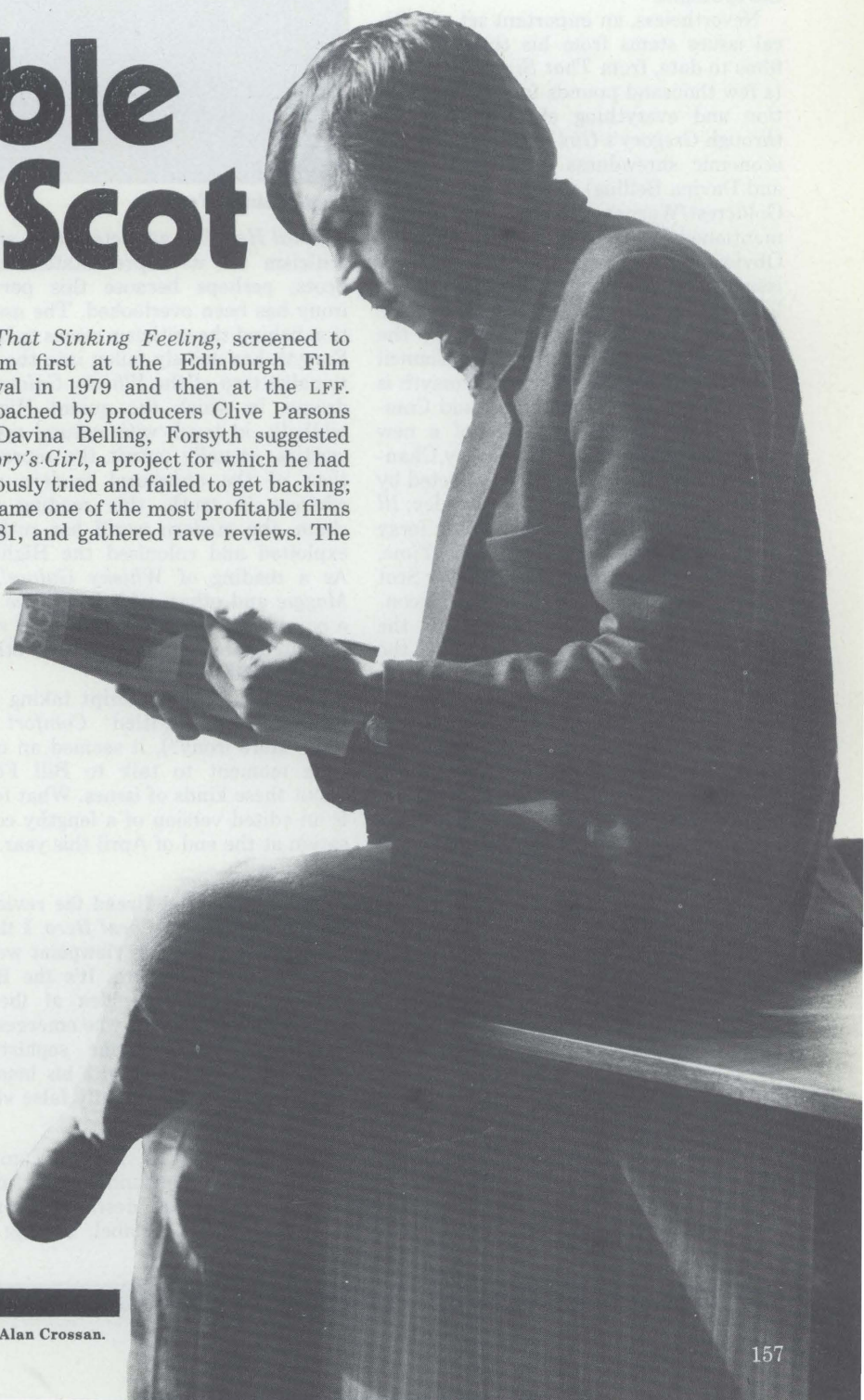
After the doldrums of the 70s, the British film and television industries have at last it seems found a fair wind. At home and overseas, people want to see British pictures. Two individuals, on whom different but perhaps equally extravagant hopes have been pinned for the future of the 'British Renaissance', are interviewed below at key moments in their careers. **John Brown** spoke to **BILL FORSYTH**, who with *Local Hero* has consolidated his international promise; and **Lynda Myles** to **VERITY LAMBERT**, whose first films, as Head of Production at Thorn-EMI, will be anxiously scrutinised for omens of success.

A suitable job for a Scot

No film, you could say, ever had a more appropriate title. From early 1982 through to the spring of this year, the media in Scotland devoted an unprecedented amount of attention to movie-making, in the shape of the production of *Local Hero*. But not primarily because David Puttnam was producing it in the immediate wake of the Oscar for *Chariots of Fire*, and not because Burt Lancaster was indeed superstarring up there in Fort William. These were bonuses; the real focus of media attention was *Local Hero*'s own local hero, writer and director Bill Forsyth, Scotland's first completely home-grown major film-maker since... well, since...

Now in his early thirties, Forsyth entered the film industry on leaving school—by the simple method of applying for a job as a gopher in a small Glasgow company making industrial and sponsored films. The crucial part of the job interview, he says, was the moment when he was asked to try lifting a heavy piece of equipment and was able to do so. By his mid-twenties he and two others had formed a company of their own, called Tree Films ('branches everywhere'), making commercials and sponsored documentaries for bodies such as the Highlands and Islands Development Board. In the late 1970s, Forsyth wanted to gain some experience of working with actors and started talking to youngsters at the Glasgow Youth Theatre, a workshop operating in one of the most deprived areas of the city. The result

was *That Sinking Feeling*, screened to acclaim first at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1979 and then at the LFF. Approached by producers Clive Parsons and Davina Belling, Forsyth suggested *Gregory's Girl*, a project for which he had previously tried and failed to get backing; it became one of the most profitable films of 1981, and gathered rave reviews. The



collaboration with Puttnam seemed almost inevitable.

The plethora of newspaper articles, radio and television interviews and production reports (the running gag at this year's Festival of Celtic Film competition section was that a special category should be invented, solely for films about the making of *Local Hero*) are indicators of the intense critical spotlight now playing on Forsyth. Characteristically, he turns such remarks aside with a joke: 'My mother still wants to know when I'm going to get a real job.' And you can sense a kind of relief in him, now that *Local Hero* is launched to critical acclaim and the box-office returns are as good as everyone hoped they would be; the movie celebrity who insists on living and working in Scotland can retreat a little from the spotlight.

Nevertheless, an important set of critical issues stems from his three feature films to date, from *That Sinking Feeling* (a few thousand pounds for post-production and everything else on goodwill) through *Gregory's Girl* (£180,000 and the economic shrewdness of Clive Parsons and Davina Belling) to *Local Hero* (£2m, Goldcrest/Warners/Fox and the aforementioned Puttnam/Lancaster element). Obviously, there are the general financial issues of film-making in Scotland, highlighted by the recent creation of the Scottish Film Production Fund by the joint action of the Scottish Film Council and the Scottish Arts Council (Forsyth is a member of the Production Fund Committee) and by the eruption of a new Scottish cinema largely funded by Channel 4: *Living Apart Together*, directed by Forsyth's ex-partner Charles Gormley; *Ill Fares The Land*, Bill Bryden's first foray into film direction; *Another Time, Another Place*, directed by honorary Scot Mike Radford; and Murray Grigor's controversial *Scotch Myths*, all shot in the past year or so. And beyond that, the links between this upsurge in activity and the situation in what is often referred to in Scotland as South Britain and the South British cinema, currently getting its act together—or so it's said—as never before. In terms of their economics and their indigenous quality (their deliberate provincialism, even), Forsyth's films are central to this new vision of British cinema.

It's arguable, however, that in this process the films themselves have been misread. The terms in which the favourable critical response has been almost uniformly expressed (freshness, charm, gentleness, warmth and so on) don't take account of the persistently cool and detached style with which Forsyth presents his characters' obsessiveness, nor of the ironic bitterness which surfaces discomfortingly from time to time: the discussion of suicide in *That Sinking Feeling*, for example, or the abrupt, unresolved ending of *Local Hero*.



That Sinking Feeling.

Local Hero has attracted some adverse criticism for its representation of the Scots, perhaps because this pervasive irony has been overlooked. The assumption behind the criticism seems to be that Forsyth has naively fallen into the traditionalist trap of the *Whisky Galore!* syndrome, in which the quaint Highland oddballs, in touch with natural mystical verities, casually outwit the representatives of the unnatural modern world; whereas in truth, this reading would claim, the modern world has ruthlessly exploited and colonised the Highlands. As a reading of *Whisky Galore!*, *The Maggie* and others, this is tenable up to a point; but Forsyth's villagers, it should be noted, are falling over each other to be exploited...

So, with the next script taking shape (provisionally entitled *Comfort and Joy*—more irony?), it seemed an opportune moment to talk to Bill Forsyth about these kinds of issues. What follows is an edited version of a lengthy conversation at the end of April this year. J.B.

JOHN BROWN: When I read the reviews of *Gregory's Girl* and *Local Hero*, I thought that from the Scottish viewpoint we have often been here before. It's the Rabbie Burns syndrome, the idea of the self-taught ploughman poet who emerges from nowhere and wows the sophisticated English establishment with his innocence and simplicity. It's a totally false view of Burns...

BILL FORSYTH: Well, I'm not complaining, but I do feel misunderstood. Looking back, I think I was destined to end up with that kind of label, coming from

Glasgow or Scotland where nothing was supposed to happen, and then suddenly there was a wee film everyone took to. But the films I've made have always had a much darker side to them than I think people have perceived, and it makes me wonder if there is really all that much understanding of what irony is. In fact, I'm beginning to reach the conclusion that people think comedy is about making us laugh, and if there is nothing more to comedy than laughs, then a lot of effort is going for nothing.

The critical response to *That Sinking Feeling*, you think, overlooked the weight of the unemployment and urban deprivation aspects?

The scene where the three boys talk about suicide has a couple of jokes, but you know, the actual situation behind all the fun is that when we were making the film there was a case of two guys killing themselves, and there's been another case of that more recently.

I thought there was much less irony operating in *Gregory's Girl* than in the other two films—it comes closer to the received idea of a Bill Forsyth film.

If it does, that's my fault, because I saw it in terms of its relationship to *That Sinking Feeling*. The characters in *Gregory's Girl* are kind of indulged—actually, in a sense, overindulged. Gregory's life is all organised for him, he doesn't have to worry if somebody's going to feed him, and he's got his best friend and his sister to turn to, to sustain him emotionally. All he's got to do is worry about who he's in love with. And the environment, the layout of the New Town, is antiseptic and almost luxurious,



Gregory's Girl: Jake D'Arcy, Dee Hepburn.

so I was seeing all that not just in relation to *That Sinking Feeling* but also in contrast to the real lives of some of the kids who were acting in *Gregory's Girl*.

But there isn't really any contrasting element within *Gregory's Girl*, like the suicide scene and the desolate landscapes in *That Sinking Feeling*, to point up the irony.

There was a scene in the original script that might have done it, but it was dropped because it didn't really move the story along. It had more to do with the situation than the story. Gregory met a boy called Gary, who had left school a few months before and had a job as a traffic enumerator. He was counting lorries on the motorway, and Gregory said, 'Is it just adding up?' and Gary said, 'No, it's division as well, I've got to divide them into articulated lorries or something.' And then this boy tells Gregory he's getting married because he's got so-and-so pregnant: 'You remember Sandra's party? Well, it was the night before—or maybe it was the night after.' Anyway, the point of the scene was that Gregory rather withdraws from Gary, as if this boy is some kind of madman. This sixteen-year-old in a dumb job is getting married, and Gregory, who is the same age, is in another kind of life entirely, and shies away from that.

Which raises the question of the process by which the film travels from original conception to what we see on the screen. Do you have a regular working method of writing—detailed outlines, for example?

No, it usually starts off with one situation or one idea. With *Gregory's Girl* it was the idea of a girl in a football team, and

from then on it was just a matter of trying to see how that idea would fit into, I suppose, the convention of the scenes that you would need in any film. So what I think I tend to do is to take that kind of big idea and say, well how would this fit into, say this scene, or that scene, which are almost conventions.

For example, if you make a film about football, there have got to be dressing room scenes, so how can the dressing room scenes in this film be different or interesting or funny in relation to the idea that there's a girl in the team? And then the idea that maybe there'll be a brassiere hanging on the hook instead of a pair of trousers. And I tend to delay the writing until I can actually see the film from beginning to end. Funnily enough, although in my head at that time there's a clear progression and although it would be unthinkable to move one scene in front of another, they don't seem all that much like straightforward stories when they end up on the screen.

Presumably that is because you have to separate out the writer from the director, in case the director bit of you says that's too expensive or technically difficult. Are the writer and director separate selves?

Completely. Sometimes I can terrorise myself when I'm writing, because I'm writing a scene which actually, you know, I don't want to direct, but I'm impelled to write it anyway. If I had my head screwed on properly, I would say, look, get rid of that because you know you don't like doing that as a director. For instance, on crowd scenes—because I suppose I'm rather a reserved person I find it difficult to communicate with large

groups of people, so I would instinctively shy away as a director from crowd scenes. But usually writing is a positive thing, a feeling of freedom, in fact, because you can write whatever you want.

In the case of *Local Hero*, wasn't the idea originated by David Puttnam and the script shaped from the beginning by discussions between you?

It was collaboration in the nicest sense, because David came to me with an idea that wouldn't have occurred to me, as a story for a film. I think that if somebody had said 'the oil business, Scotland' I would automatically have thought of Aberdeen and the industrial, technological stuff and an elaborate story with lots to explain. But the first thing David did when we started talking was to screen *Whisky Galore!*, and that was fine because I knew he was thinking of a small-scale, people thing, not the technology. And then I thought of that old television series *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and I wrote a two-page outline starting with a quote from the series and describing the situation of a small village with the oil company coming.

What was the next stage?

I came back to Glasgow and wrote the script. It was very long and the second draft was really to shorten it. David and I talked a lot during that stage.

Who did you see as the title character?

At one stage the emphasis was on the hotel-keeper who was going to out-manoeuvre the oilmen, but that was going to involve too much plot for me—I like to keep things simple. So I diverted the emphasis for those reasons of my own on to the American.

It wasn't the solution to the 'give it some international appeal' issue that often afflicts British production?

Absolutely not. In fact, when it came to casting we had to fight a bit for the idea of Lancaster. It was suggested that he would maybe unbalance the film. But as I've said before, he was the actor I had in mind for Happer from the beginning of the script.

You know the criticism of films like *Whisky Galore!*, *The Maggie* and *Brigadoon*, that they misrepresent the Scots. What's your attitude to them?

I didn't see *The Maggie* till it was on television after we had finished filming *Local Hero*. I got a bit of a fright and I phoned David, actually. But afterwards I felt quite touched that I had unconsciously followed the same kind of progression on from *Whisky Galore!* as Sandy Mackendrick did. And I'm afraid I fell asleep watching *Brigadoon*, because I had just driven down from Glasgow to London. But I think you can criticise those films for the way the Scots are romanticised in them, as long as you remember you can criticise anything historically—and English films in those



Local Hero: Peter Capaldi, Peter Riegert and rabbit.

days were misrepresenting the English even more. All those funny voices.

The incident of the fog and the rabbit looks like a direct reference to *Brigadoon*. Actually, I was thinking of Capra's *Lost Horizon*, where they go through the pass, and I wanted a kind of marker from one world to another. But the *Brigadoon* thing—I just knew about it without having seen it.

I thought the fate of the rabbit was in a sense the key to *Local Hero*, because it seemed to me that all the characters were deluded fantasists in a way, except for Urquhart the hotel-keeper and his wife, who just regard the rabbit as meat for the pot. I had the feeling that incident wrong-footed the audience—it almost shocked them.

I think that general idea about fantasising is true, and possibly true of the other things I've done, because when you have got this kind of shape that you are trying to fill, you tend to draw on things you've used before and which preoccupy you anyway. And one of my preoccupations is the idea of how everyone inhabits the world and sees himself or herself in a certain way and absolutely no one else sees them in that way. In fact, the whole philosophy of *Gregory's Girl* was that especially in adolescence you have a very precise image of yourself and you are completely unaware of the fact that the world sees you as something different.

There's really no resolution of that problem in *Gregory's Girl* or in *Local Hero*—in fact, you make a technique out of not resolving things, like the business of the mermaid.

I didn't want the mermaid thing to be

resolved any more than it was; I wanted that to be half explained and half not explained. I didn't want there to be any more than there was in the relationship between Urquhart's wife and Mac. You know, he doesn't even say cheerio to her at the end.

I liked the terseness of the ending, and the emotional effect of the final shot of the telephone kiosk. From now on, Mac's going to be haunted.

I think there's a kind of positive side to it, because from the beginning he is a telephone man, it's how he calls up his resources. In fact, there was something in the earlier draft of the script about him talking on the phone in his Porsche to the mechanic who looks after his car and that came in again at the end. So the idea as it stands is that even if nobody answers, he has got more resources now, he can ring the village. But at the same time, I am glad if it rather disturbs people, because it does surprise me when people only see the lighter side of the film, and I think I'm maybe reacting against that in the next one. For instance, it's set in Glasgow and I feel it would be wrong to sidestep the business of the violence in big cities. I don't know yet how I'm going to utilise that element, but I think it's going to be there.

What about other future projects?

I'd like to contemplate a film which didn't have any male characters in it at all, just women.

That sounds like a response to the particular degree of male-dominated society in Scotland.

No, it's more a reaction to films. So many films just deal in stereotypes as far as

characters are concerned, and it really disappoints me.

What films have you seen in the past few years that you really admire?

McCabe and Mrs Miller, *Badlands* and *Sitting Ducks* and *Hero*, Barney Platts-Mills' film, would be top of the list. *Sitting Ducks* is wonderful, and it's a shame it isn't better known—I've mentioned it to people in New York and amazingly they don't know about it. But I haven't managed to see a lot of the most recent films.

How do you see a future Scottish cinema taking shape?

The situation seems pretty healthy, with the feature films that have been made in the past year. Five years ago, what we all said was that we needed an audience, and I think we have that now in Scotland. When *Gregory's Girl* opened in Glasgow initially, it played three weeks, then after it had been in London and all that, it came back and played seventy-five weeks. But *Local Hero* worked from the start, and I think that audiences in Scotland will go to see Scottish films now because they're past that psychological barrier of thinking oh, it's likely to be terrible.

That means that I can stay in Scotland now and know that I can make a film people will probably want to see. And that's going to be true for all the other guys, because we have always said we've got all the talent we need, and the films made in the last year prove it. All we have to do is to get the economics right. If we can make the films for between half-a-million and a million pounds, we can satisfy the audience and just about guarantee that the money won't be thrown away, with that domestic market and with a television sale or involvement bringing back maybe a third and a couple of foreign markets which are likely to be there.

Definitely no move to Hollywood?

At this stage, for me, America would demand compromises which don't interest me. It's what's here that interests me.

It strikes me that the current revival of self-confidence in what you might call the South British cinema has a lot to do with the re-emergence of the real producer, like David Puttnam or Clive Parsons. I mean producers who want to produce, instead of that being a substitute for or a means to writing and directing.

There is no more than a handful of good producers, but I think more of them are going to come along, because the people you mention and others are a model for people to aspire to. In fact, it's kind of hip in London just now not to talk about directing but about producing, so in a few years we should have a good base of producers. Which is good news, personally, because I couldn't stand the strain of producing, and I think that if you're writing and directing you really need someone to keep objective—you know,

three or four weeks into shooting you might compromise on a scene, just to get home. And it's nice to have a small voice saying, don't you remember six months ago when you told me about this scene, you told me you were going to do that and don't you think it would be good to... So it's almost like a conscience, and that's something I find quite valuable.

Do you work from a storyboard when you're shooting?

No, I can't draw, so it really boils down to a relationship with the cameraman which is established in the weeks before the shoot. Usually I've just one rule of

thumb, which is to try to make the camera serve the action, not the actors *per se*, but the action. I just try to use the camera to reveal the action and to serve it, rather than be emphatic in any way. I think that because of over-emphatic acting style and overemphatic camera style the audience's options become limited, and they have been asked to do less and less work. I would hate to be accused of trying to manipulate an audience into one or other emotion at any one time.

The nicest thing anyone can say to me about *Local Hero* is, I saw your movie last week and I'm still thinking about it

and I might even go and see it again, because there were one or two things I was thinking about that I want to check out. That means the audience are really working hard and I think that's wonderful. They are the film in that sense. And when I've seen it with a large audience, say about a thousand people, then I can sense that happening: one or two people kind of giggle at something and no one else will and then someone at the back will start laughing at nothing in particular, which means that they're all sitting there churning it over themselves. I think that's wonderful, I really do. Makes me feel good when that happens. □

Producing the goods

Verity Lambert's rise from being a £7-a-week secretary at Granada Television (from which she was fired) to Head of Production at Thorn-EMI reads almost like a Hollywood script. Recruited by Sydney Newman, she became, at 27, the BBC's youngest producer. During her time with the Corporation, she produced *Dr Who*, a series of Somerset Maugham stories, *The Newcomers* and *Adam Adamant*. Moving to London Weekend Television, she was responsible for, among others, *Budgie* and *Between the Wars*, before returning to the BBC to produce *Shoulder to Shoulder*.

In 1974, she was appointed Head of Drama at Thames Television, where she initiated many of the most influential television series of the last decade. Between her Thames role and her later role as Chief Executive of Euston Films (a wholly owned subsidiary of Thames Television), she initiated *Rock Follies*, *Bill Brand*, *Edward and Mrs Simpson*, *Danger UXB*, *Out, Fox, Minder*, *Widows* and the much acclaimed *Naked Civil Servant*. The current projects with which she is involved include, as well as some one-off films, *Reilly*, a Troy Kennedy

Martin series, directed by Jim Goddard and Martin Campbell; *The Nation's Health*, directed by Les Blair; and a fourth series of *Minder*.

In October 1982, she was appointed Head of Production at Thorn-EMI, retaining her Euston job but relinquishing that at Thames. At Thorn-EMI, she has creative responsibility for all EMI film

production and has indicated a desire to increase the number of indigenous films produced by the company. The two years preceding Verity Lambert's appointment had not been profitable for EMI. Barry Spikings, then Chairman and Chief Executive of EMI Films, gambled on mega-budgeted films geared towards the American market. In May 1980, he had announced a \$110m production programme, of which \$40m was to be spent



on two films, *Can't Stop the Music* and *Honky Tonk Freeway*. Both were commercial failures and Spikings left Thorn-EMI in December 1982. Verity Lambert has the ticklish task of proving to the company that a more balanced programme of low to medium-budgeted films can be successful. Given her dynamism and her extraordinary television record, her appointment is a propitious augury for the future of the British film industry.

L.M.

LYNDA MYLES: Your early career in television drama was during a particularly exciting period under Sydney Newman.

VERITY LAMBERT: Sydney really did change the face of British television drama. Before there had been those rather nice stage plays which had been reworked for television. Sydney came straight in with social realism and overnight changed the way people looked at and accepted television drama. I worked mostly for Ted Kotcheff, who taught me a great deal, an excellent director of actors with a very good visual sense.

You've never been afraid of controversy. Does that stem from this period?

Possibly. But I also believe that the essence of good drama is conflict of one kind or another. I never thought of *The Naked Civil Servant*, for example, as controversial. The subject was controversial, but I felt that the screenplay was extremely illuminating about homosexuality. Given the people who were to be involved, such as the director Jack Gold, I felt it would be done in such a way that it wouldn't be controversial. In fact we had very few letters of complaint, probably fewer than the *News* or *Crossroads*.

At Euston Films, you were in charge of both film and television drama.

I had a curious progression. First, I was in charge of television drama, which was mainly tape with film inserts. Then I did both. Then I went to Euston and did only film drama. That really involved drama series, although we did make *The Sailor's Return*, *Charlie Muffin*, *The Knowledge* and *Quatermass*, a four-part series later edited into a single film.

How distinct do you find film and television?

In terms of the writer's role, it's very different. I think that the writer's role in film is important, but in television or the theatre the writer's words can be sacrosanct. In film, the tendency is to get a screenplay and then to alter it. That tendency arises since film is a visual medium and film directors very often have very little respect for the text. The attitude towards the soundman in film is very interesting. All the emphasis is on the cameraman and the soundman is almost like an afterthought.

At the moment you are both Head of



London Weekend Television's *Budgie* (1971): Joe Gladwin, Adam Faith.

Production at Thorn-EMI and Chief Executive of Euston Films. Do you intend to continue to do both?

I shall stay at Euston until the end of this year, and hope to continue in association with the company thereafter. It's early days to tell if I can do both.

Is it still your intention, as you announced earlier, to make six films a year at Thorn-EMI?

Well, that's what I would like. But I think it's going to be difficult, not because the money isn't there, but because it takes so much time to get a film into production. We are in fact shooting one film now that was in development when I arrived and which we progressed [*Slayground*, scripted by Trevor Preston, directed by Terry Bedford, starring Peter Coyote]. But in terms of the projects we're going to develop ourselves, they're just not going to be ready to shoot this year. We have been inundated with scripts and packages, but I'm determined not to make anything I don't feel strongly about. I'll take a leaf out of David Puttnam's book, because I think he has had a great deal of commitment to every film he's made.

What sort of budgets are you likely to have?

I never like to say five or six projects on budgets of \$6m, which was what I first said, as these statements tend to come back to you on a tablet of stone. I would like to be flexible, and any budget will be considered up to about \$10m. We could finance that ourselves, but anything over that would require co-production money. I favour making medium-budget films, around \$6m or \$7m, or even some costing

a great deal less. I don't think something has to cost a great deal of money to be good.

How committed are you to the idea of a British cinema?

I want somehow to redress the balance between Britain and America. Although two of the projects I'm keen on making are American, we do have another English subject in development. It's called *Illegal Aliens*, is written by Griff Rhys Jones and Mel Smith, and will be produced by Barrie Hanson. I hope that we'll start shooting this year. I'd like to think that we'll find another two British subjects, which would mean that the two American subjects would be balanced by four British, rather than the other way round, as it has been previously.

Given that Britain represents only four per cent of the world market, how far must you gear your projects to the American audience?

I think you must find a subject which may be British, but has some quality of universality about it; it should have the ability to stretch out in the way that, say, *Chariots of Fire* and *Gandhi* do, although they are both patently British films. If you are going to make films which cost \$6m or \$7m, you are going to have to find subject matter which transcends the barriers—and there's no reason why that shouldn't happen. I've discovered over the last six months, however, that it would be easier for me to find three or four good screenplays in America than to find them here. I think that's because over the years the British film industry has been so crippled that writers and directors have got out of the habit of



Thorn-EMI's *Slayground* (1983): Peter Coyote, Bill Luhrs, Ned Eisenburg.

thinking in terms of the big screen. They think very well for the small screen or for the small movie. But I believe it's going to take a little longer to get subjects from Britain into development. The energy is going to have to come from us; we will have to be activators rather than receivers.

In terms of the future of the British film industry, how much reality do you think there is behind the rhetoric surrounding the Oscar successes?

As an optimist, I can only look at it positively. Thorn-EMI, for example, are putting up money to make films. If I can prove to them that the film industry is viable and profit-making rather than loss-making, then they will continue to support it. I think this is quite marvellous and remarkable, given the huge losses they sustained over the last two years.

That's a very good thing, but that's only one area. This kind of support has to be carried out in the independent sector and into the City. The only way you can do that is to say, 'Look, British films can make money and they can be accepted abroad. We have excellent people here who are recognised outside this country.' A film like the Oscar-winning short *A Shocking Accident* [directed by James Scott, produced by Christine Oestreicher], which was partly financed by the National Film Finance Corporation, should be used as a flagship to persuade the Government that they must support the film industry in the grant-aided sector. I think that the NFFC's feature-making programme should be supported also. If support is withdrawn from that, it's an absolute

crime. The BFI Production Board must also be supported, because it's from those two areas that a lot of our young directors will emerge.

You recently resigned from the Chairmanship of the BFI Production Board. How did you feel initially about joining the Board?

I felt I was going to learn a lot. I spoke to David Puttnam about it, and he suggested that I ought to join for that reason. I knew that I was going to come into contact with people who had much more academic knowledge of film than me, since I came from a straightforward teach-yourself commercial area. I thought it was going to be rather interesting, but I was a bit nervous as well. Sometimes you think things are rubbish as a way of protecting yourself, so I tried very hard to submerge that part of my personality and to view things without a jaundiced eye.

Do you support the Directors' Guild argument for a new fund for British film-making?

In principle I do. But I don't think that they are going to raise enough money from that kind of levy. I'm much more in favour of the Association of Independent Producers' view, which is that there ought to be some kind of levy on tape, because I think that will produce the much larger revenue which is required.

Do you believe that much can be done to halt the collapse of cinema audiences in Britain?

First, we could publicise films much more effectively. At the moment, it's often very hard to find out what's showing and how long it lasts. In America, every single

local paper runs a comprehensive guide to cinemas, and the times of performances. We don't really encourage people to go to the cinema here. We don't let them book seats in advance, for example. There seems to be a brand of people who want to work on front-of-house who quite enjoy seeing others queuing in the rain and who then get a big kick out of telling them that the house is full.

The cinemas themselves often leave a lot to be desired in terms of cleanliness and the way they've been maintained. You sometimes feel that you take your life in your hands when you go into the cinema, and money has to be spent on decorating cinemas and making them more attractive. Most cinemas were built forty or fifty years ago and should be replaced. There should be pressure on councils to ensure that, when they approve a shopping mall, for example, this should include a prominent, multi-screen cinema, as is the case in America. I grew up when there were three cinema chains, and I went three times a week to the cinema. Admittedly, there wasn't any television then, but I loved the cinema. Unfortunately, I don't think that most people who run cinemas have woken up to the fact that television exists—it's as if they're living in some kind of time warp.

When you were at Euston Films, you initiated several interesting genre series, like the gangster series *Out*. Is this an area you particularly liked?

Yes, I did enjoy them. What drew me to *Out* was the writing and the relationship between the two obsessive characters who were in conflict. I didn't really think of it as a gangster movie as such, but rather as a compelling piece of writing by Trevor Preston. I have very catholic tastes, in that I love all films when I love them. For example, I thought *Raging Bull* was wonderful, extraordinarily well made and acted, and terribly shocking in parts, though normally I would have said that I didn't particularly like films about boxing. It's very hard for me to say that I like any particular kind of film. Perhaps that's a good thing as it means that I have an open mind about what comes to me.

Do you have a strong sense of what audiences want at this moment?

In a very general way, I think people want romance, optimism, comedy-entertainment. If you look at the success of films like *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *E.T.* or *Gandhi*, it shows that. There is a world recession, and people are going through hard times. If they can afford to go to the cinema, they don't want to be told about other people's hard times. They want to be allowed to forget and be transported for 90 minutes into something which gives them hope, like *Rocky III*. That's a bit simplistic, but it's the overall feeling I have. ■

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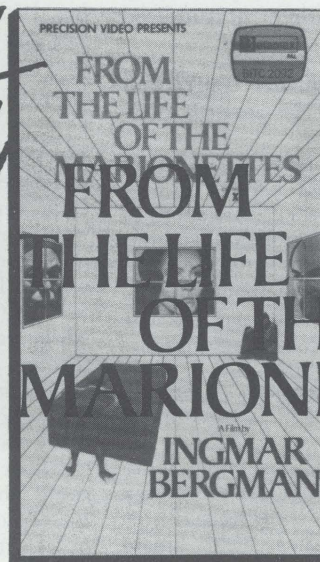
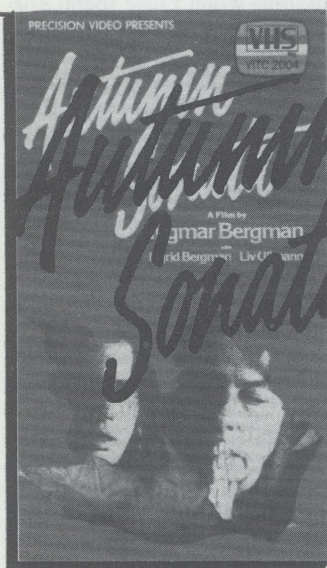
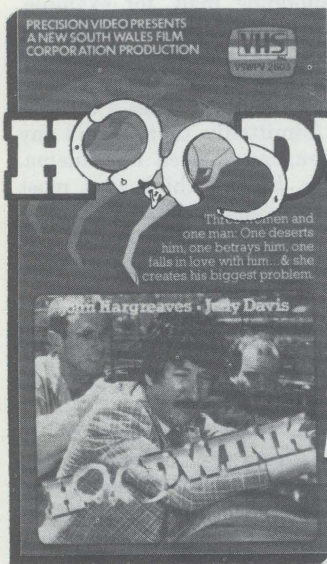
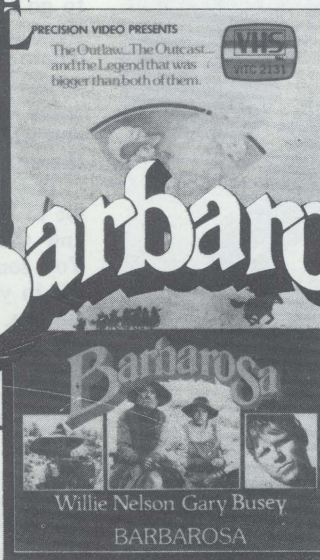
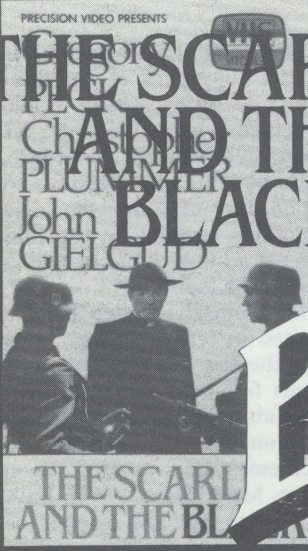
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Independent Sector

James Park

Independent producers were identified in the Annan Report as a 'force for diversity and new ideas'. From then on, the case for a fourth British television channel was argued by media professionals as if the setting up of an independent television production sector would automatically result in a distinctive and innovative television service. It was a convenient confusion that allowed the Channel Four Group consistently to combine the statement of lofty principles with the pragmatism of programme-makers in search of new and more lucrative pastures. And the go-ahead for Channel 4 was given by a government which may have welcomed the fine rhetoric about experiment and the need to satisfy new audiences, but in fact found other ideological justifications for setting up an entrepreneurial sector comprised of numerous small businesses.

To judge from the initial press response to Channel 4, what the public wanted was a different form of stimulation. It was a media send-off that no money could buy. The *Daily Mail* reckoned that, 'of those who stole themselves to look, some feel only anger, while others seek to cover their obvious embarrassment by sniggering.' Channel 4, it was argued elsewhere, 'confuses TV with social work.' It was also 'totally out of touch with popular taste and moral conviction.' And everyone had something to chip in, even a reader of the *Daily Express* who confessed that she lived in a 'no-go' area for the Channel, but just wanted to say that 'even looking at the programmes advertised in your TV pages, I am not impressed with the fare on offer.'

The silence of the 180 or so independent producers spawned by Channel 4 in the face of this barrage should not be ascribed to shame at the seeming unpopularity of their programmes. In fact, the current concerns of the independent sector, as of the Channel itself, have more to do with economic survival and material growth than the ideals of media academics. Most independents will frankly admit that their ambition is to

use Channel 4 as a springboard into producing for the main UK and foreign networks, then for cable and satellite networks, videograms, etc. At the headquarters of their trade association, IPPA, the talk is of a more equitable business relationship between the independent producer and Channel 4, involving demands for a higher production fee, a more advantageous split of sales revenue and better deals on co-productions.

There had been a small, if elitist, independent production sector even before Channel 4, and it is notable that two of the best established partners with the BBC found it difficult to stomach the terms on offer from the new channel. London Films has now done a 'Film on Four' called *Country Girls*, but its major current project is a five-part adaptation of Angus Wilson's *Old Men at the Zoo*, which follows other BBC co-productions such as *Thérèse Raquin*, *Claudius*, *Poldark* and *The Testament of Youth*. Consolidated Productions has a more variegated four-year history. With Euston Films it co-produced *The Flame Trees of Thika*. It made British television history by being the first UK company to produce a US network series, *Q.E.D.*, and is currently involved with the BBC in a ten-part series, *By the Sword Divided*, set during the English Civil War. As yet it has made no deals with Channel 4.

Established companies that did get on to the Channel 4 bandwagon were generally seeking to enlarge their area of activity. Video Arts, for example, has been making business training films for over a decade. While it had already begun to produce drama and documentaries for US clients, it's only Channel 4 which has enabled it to become a fully fledged production company. It is contracted to do for Channel 4 *Report to the Nation*, a monthly programme which puts the management of state run industries under the spotlight. It has also done *The Arabs*, a major series which was largely financed by Kufic Films but with some Channel 4 participation, and *Start Here*, a series on science for children. Other companies involved in 'bread and butter' productions before Channel 4 came on the scene include Dolphin Communications, which was responsible for the two-part documentary *Jailed by the British*, and Holmes and Associates, which produced the family health feature *Well Being* and is involved in regular 'Jazz on Four' productions.

Apart from these, the most dynamic companies tend to have their base in other, related, areas. Goldcrest Television is the younger brother of Goldcrest Films, which together are but flicks in the eye of the Pearson Longman conglomerate whose other holdings include Penguin Books and the *Financial Times*. The company provided seventy hours of prestige programming for the Channel's first year. Primetime Television, the producer of *Nicholas Nickleby*, is an offshoot of the 15-year-old television distribution operation Richard Price Television. The Moving Picture Company is the only video facilities and commercial production house to be significantly involved in production for Channel 4. All three

Jailed by the British: 1940, en route to internment.



companies have sufficient back-up to operate autonomously in the international market and work closely with the major UK network companies.

But the bulk of the producers working for Channel 4, including some absorbed within the above-mentioned companies, are defectors from the BBC and ITCA system, who broke out to escape the constrictions of a bureaucratic structure and are seeking to embrace the pleasures and challenges of being your own boss. 'You can develop your own projects and decide what you want to make,' says one producer, 'and you also learn how to make each pound work for you. The challenge of doing it yourself is quite exciting.'

A glance at the rosters of Channel 4 producers shows the extent to which, despite all the talk of 'new entrants to broadcasting', the new network has drawn upon talent nurtured over decades in the established sector. *The Chinese* is being produced through Ash Films by Peter Montagnon, who formerly did such documentary series as *Civilisation* and *The Long Search* for the BBC. Lavinia Warner, who did *Jailed by the British* through Dolphin Communications, was the originator of the BBC's prison camp series *Tenko*. The whole Telekation team, apart from Barry Hanson, came from the BBC Education Department. Their projects include *Practical Book Review*, the three-part *Nukes* satire, a multicultural programme for children, *Everybody Here*, and *The Wine Programme*. From Black Lion, the film-making subsidiary of the old ATV, came Jacky Stoller, whose Tempest Films has done for Channel 4 the *Three Men in a Boat* dramatisation, John Pilger's interview series *The Outsiders* and *Grand Old Ladies* with Anna Raeburn. A major source of light entertainment specials for the Channel is the Bright Thought Company, which is headed by Brian Izzard, formerly in charge of light entertainment for the defunct network company Southern Television. David Elstein was at Thames Television when he set up Brook Productions, which has provided Channel 4 with the twice weekly discussion programme *Voices*, the regular *A Week in Politics*, and a 14-part series on bridge.

It is notably programmes from this less structured area of the independent sector that raised the howls of protest from the popular press, a response that some would take as an indication of success. The Channel's offerings had succeeded magnificently in touching a raw nerve. The feminist revue *In the Pink* from Tempest Productions, which closed Channel 4's first night, was condemned by Chris Dunkley of the *Financial Times* as a manifestation of 'sexual apartheid'. It was Dunkley too who charged the Channel with 'fascism' in its approach to programming for minorities. *The Friday Alternative*, an alternative news programme from former *Panorama* producer David Graham of Diverse Productions, comes under regular attack, although the professional view is that it's one of the most passionate and innovative programmes around. 'A fairly superficial load of snippets,' said one current affairs producer, 'but at least it is different, exceptionally different.' The gay special *One in Five* from Kinesis Films was described by Tory MP John Carlisle as 'television for minorities indeed', with the suggestion that such a programme was deeply offensive to public feeling. And the *Standard's* Sue Summers sent one of her numerous barbs against the amusing *Curious Case of Santa Claus* from Edinburgh Film Productions, with the question 'Who but Channel 4 would feature Father Christmas going to see a psychiatrist?'

For the press, producers and some executives at Channel 4, this was all good sport. Nevertheless, reports of low morale among commissioning editors, many of whom were not experienced broadcasters, suggested that the attack was being seriously listened to. After all, had not the Channel promised to be responsive to the 'changing needs of audiences'? Channel controller Paul Bonner certainly thought so, to judge from his plaintive assurances that 'we are not out to offend and we are certainly not here to offer programmes that people find dull.' Bonner went on to put the blame on the Channel's distance from its suppliers: 'We have to nurse and encourage them towards the level of quality we want. It's not like the BBC, where you

just change the producer. We cannot pull wires—only rubber bands.'

Nor were the signs of backsliding absent in the statements emanating from higher echelons. Chief executive Jeremy Isaacs spoke apologetically of the emphasis on factual programming, which resulted 'partly from my own predilections, and possibly a too literal interpretation of the obligation to provide an alternative to the predominantly lightweight nature of ITV programming.' And managing director Justin Dukes blamed it all on the fact that drama and entertainment series called for longer lead times than in-studio discussion programmes, 'which were never in any case the mainstay of the Channel's programming.'

Such thinking was evident in the spring 1983 schedules. The emphasis now was on light entertainment, sport and drama. Shows like *Father's Day* from Picture Partnership Productions, *The Optimist* from New Century Productions, *The Late Clive James* and *Capstick Capers* were wheeled in to give some boost to the ratings. Dukes again had a justification ready. There was no change in philosophy, he said. 'The unusual things are still there but we are not banging the drums about them.' He argued in April that Channel 4 had now attained its core audience, those who would 'fight their way through jungles and across mountains to watch certain types of programmes that interest them.' The present marketing effort is concentrated on persuading other elements in the population to tune in.

Independent producers no longer have the option of challenging the Channel's basic philosophy. They must shut up and adapt to its current demands, or perish. Two years ago, Jeremy Isaacs promised that 20 per cent of the Channel's programming would come from the independent sector. Some 180 companies later, and over 50 per cent of the initial commissions have gone to indies. But the commissioning level will not be as high again, since repeats and stockpiled programmes will make up part of the second year's transmissions. Also, from an initial policy of letting two hundred flowers

Well Being: In the delivery room.

The Curious Case of Santa Claus: Jon Pertwee, James Coco.



bloom in order to maximise the opportunities for diversity, the intention now is to concentrate funds on a few key suppliers to ensure the financial stability of the independent sector.

What is at issue here is not the continued existence of those small companies which are really no more than jumped-up freelances, a 'person and a typewriter' operation which can move with ease between Channel 4 and jobs for the network companies. A company like Mirus Productions, which advertised two telephone numbers on different exchanges, the homes of Howard Johnson and Mike Wallington who made a six-part documentary on Jamaican music and culture, are part of the lifeblood of Channel 4. But, as one producer put it, 'television is about treadmills, and people with amazing ideas don't run treadmills.'

Providing sixty hours of television programmes a week is a frightening exercise that cannot be predicated on streams of inspired people coming through the door. The Channel has to encourage the development of a group of companies which will be available to tender project ideas to given specifications and generally guarantee to provide a certain amount of material for the schedules. Some companies have already declared themselves suitable candidates, setting up offices with secretaries and executives before they had anything like the guaranteed turnaround necessary to maintain their overheads.

But in determining how many of these operations should be encouraged, and how many put out of their misery, what procedure is the Channel going to adopt? It doesn't seem that the senior executives have any very clear idea. Some speak privately of cutting the number of companies from around 180 to 15, as many as the ITCA network. Isaacs last December mentioned a figure of 75. Dukes has his eye on 30 to 40. But, in fact, any surgical operation presents the Channel with a serious dilemma. There are, of course, some large companies like Goldcrest, Video Arts and Moving Picture Company which cannot be ignored. There are zesty operations like Rock People Movies, makers of the youth access programme *Whatever You Want*, and *Silent Part-*

ners, producers of the *Switch* live music special, which have established an expertise in a certain area. There are other operators, particularly in youth and multicultural areas, which may not yet be supremely competent but have a potential that Channel 4 ought to encourage. How can you discriminate between these sectors, and fulfil your commitment to new faces and new programme-makers?

The Channel's hope is that the contraction of the independent sector to more secure proportions, far from being traumatic, will result from natural forces. 'What would happen in any other field,' asks Dukes, 'where a large number of individuals had proved themselves very successfully? Taking a medium to long-term view, they would realise that operating in isolation is not the most sensible thing. Groups should form so that they can give each other the strength that comes from operating together.' But no one should need reminding that the programme production business is dependent on a processing of continuously regenerated creativity, which puts it outside many normal business practices. Channel 4 is itself a recognition of the need to maintain diversity against monopoly concentration.

Nevertheless, in the flurry of manoeuvrings prior to the Channel's formation, at least two co-operatives formed from producers and others capable of initiating projects. In both cases the aim was only partly to enable a group of people to have access to a company whose overheads would be paid out of a continuous flow of work from diverse sources. It was also to provide a supportive structure for people of like creative minds.

Quintet describes itself as a 'United Artists-type consortium', comprising writers Jack Rosenthal and Willy Russell, director Jack Gold and producers Victor Glynn and Mike Ockrent. Although each member is free to work outside the group, the aim is that its producers should seek to activate projects by the other members. 'We commission ideas,' says Gold, 'or ideas are sent to us, or Channel 4 will suggest something because they think we are the best people to do it. Then we

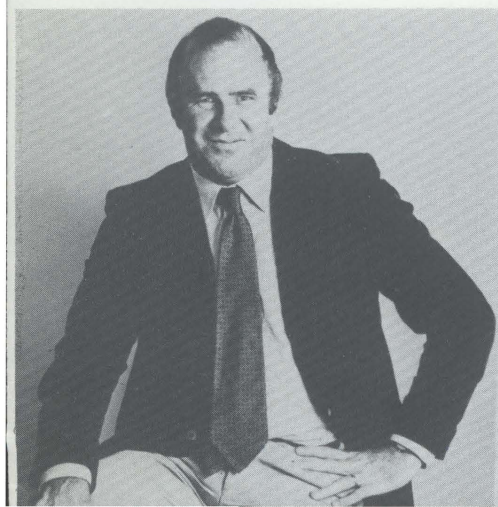
shop around for money, or invest some of our own.' Quintet made *Shakespeare Lives!* for Channel 4, a series of six workshops led by Michael Bogdanov. In preparation is a 'Film on Four', *Good and Bad at Games*, which Gold will direct from a script by William Boyd, and a feature version of the J. G. Farrell novel *The Siege of Krishnapur*, as well as a series of short films, *Terraces*, scripted by Willy Russell.

Partners in Production is a more wide-ranging set-up, comprising some 35 people from all areas of production. They include producer Otto Plaschkes, producer/directors Michael Darlow and Rod Taylor, cameramen/directors Nick Gifford, Chris Menges and Dianne Tammes, together with sound recordists, composers, editors and designers. 'The point of PIP,' says Darlow, 'is to encourage people to take initiatives, and to combat the loneliness of being freelance. It's also to bring together that enormous range of expertise and encourage people to work together.' The company's productions include a 'Film on Four', *Accounts*, which Darlow directed, a 90-minute drama documentary, *Going Home*, and a 45-minute drama, *Summer's Awakening*. Additionally, it has done a first series of six music programmes, *The Other Side of the Tracks*.

Michael Darlow is himself sceptical about the general validity of the 'concentration as merger' model, pointing out that the formation of PIP was the result of over a year's discussions. 'I am sure,' he says, 'that Channel 4 can have an influence in encouraging people, but they have to be very sure not to force people into things if they are not going to work. If you destroy the pace, you'll actually destroy the independent sector.' In his view, the different aspirations of producers and their divergent ideas about business practices act against any possibility of widespread merger.

Channel 4 has necessarily had to draw a fine line between the requirement that it gives the independent sector full creative freedom, and the need to lay down strict guidelines regarding business practices. Stories about producers whose response to a commission was to seek enrolment on a production management

The Late Clive James.



Father's Day: John Alderton, Rosalind Ayres and brood. The Optimist: Enn Reitel, disguised



course might justify what many producers see as the Channel's heavy-handed paternalism in this area. Instead of relying on the goodwill of producers and their desire to maintain a relationship with the Channel, budgets have been analysed down to the last detail and cash flow has been strictly supervised. Contracts are long, detailed and crammed with legalisms. Negotiations are so tough that one producer quipped recently, 'After making a deal with Channel 4, you are ready to go into battle with an American major.'

Some of this seeming excess must be attributed to cynicism about the capacity of the independent sector to deliver projects on budget and on schedule. But Dukes also points to the fact that the Channel is ultimately accountable to the public accounts committee, not a cosy group of shareholders. Given the depressed state of the economy, he feels that television generally must be seen to make every penny work hard. 'The last thing I am going to do is have a situation where a perfectly sensible channel is going to be hauled over the coals because its management of fairly small amounts of expenditure is not prudent and disciplined.'

Several factors suggest that there will be an increasing polarisation between the well-structured, entrepreneurially minded independent production companies and the smaller operations, even without positive action by the Channel to undercut the latter category. The potential gap becomes clearly apparent in looking at the Channel's policy on sales. Whereas any project financed 100 per cent by Channel 4 is to be sold under the Channel 4 imprimatur by a Channel 4 agent, the producer who brings in even a small amount of co-production coin is free to make his own arrangement. The company with the prestige and position to secure cash from the city or foreign partners has, therefore, incomparably greater freedom of movement than the more limited operations.

What an internationally orientated package of programmes looks like can be seen from one glance at Goldcrest's television mix. There are three chintzy 'First

Love' telemovies for which deals have been signed with Thorn EMI Video and Twentieth Century-Fox for European distribution. US cable supplier Home Box Office is the crucial element in the financing of the \$15m *Far Pavilions*. There's a series, *The Body Machine*, introduced by heart surgeon and playboy Christiaan Barnard. Made with Harlech Television, as well as a group of indie stations in the US and Australia, is *Robin Hood and the Sorcerer*.

Ted Barnes, the recently appointed sales officer for the Moving Picture Company, argues that independent producers have a considerable edge over the network companies in their capacity to exploit the international market. That is because they can tailor their programming to market needs, rather than being constrained by the demands of the native audience, which is the central obligation on a broadcaster. 'We will make programmes the same way we make commercials,' Barnes says, 'according to the needs of clients. We will produce programmes that Channel 4 wants, we will also make programmes delivering to the American market what the American market wants.' In fact, the initial output from MPC was largely geared to the requirements of Channel 4, with such documentary series as *Tom Keating on Painters*, a series on *Mothers by Daughters* and a *Stand Your Ground* series on self-defence. But as the company becomes more confident and catches the scent of co-production coin, its attention is shifting to drama productions.

Some small companies were surprisingly successful in securing pre-production commitment, either locally or from offshore sources, for projects in the first batch of Channel 4 commissions. The fledgling but hyperactive Bright Thoughts Company got RKO to put up the total budget for its version of the Molière farce *Sganarelle*, which Channel 4 then purchased. But generally speaking the Channel's policy does not encourage such individual initiatives. 'It is ridiculous,' says Dukes, 'to expect 150 independents all to become highly competent in the sabre-toothed jungle of the international marketplace.' And increased activity by the larger opera-

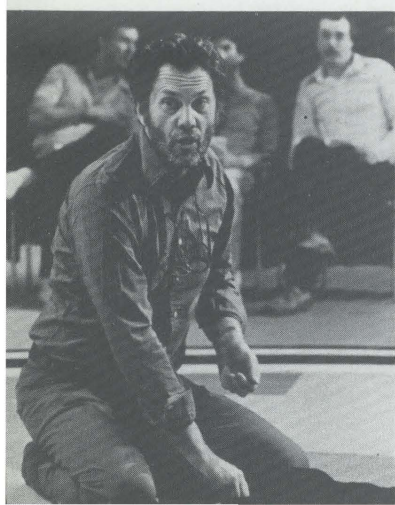
tions means that the marketplace is in any case getting rather crowded.

For some time it seemed likely that Channel 4 would encourage the growth of a diversified independent sales sector, capable of giving 'selective and specialised' handling to a range of programming. Those who had come from network companies voiced their unhappiness at the way in which sales agents had tended to consign their work to the bottom of a sales package. And there seemed plenty of justification for the Channel to experiment with a variety of approaches to cracking the international market. But although one company, Television Partners, was formed specifically to offer a specialised service for independent producers, most of the sales community were unexcited by the prospect of handling Channel 4's wares. The Channel wanted to get revenues flowing from foreign markets as soon as possible, and decided that the best way to develop a powerful sales force for independents was to allot exclusive franchises to two heavyweights well used to handling the products of major companies. Richard Price Television Associates is to sell Channel 4 product to the rest of the world outside North and South America, the territories taken by US agent Telepictures.

There are, of course, cynics who suggest that all the talk of pickings and profits from the international market is grossly exaggerated. Channel 4, along with other networks, only expects to sell about 10 per cent of its annual output to any market. And although the global take may be reasonable, it is made up of many minute payments. John Gau claims that he had to sell his 'ripping good yarn' *Sunken Gold* to 25 countries to gross £110,000, and says that he would be 'flabbergasted' if the Channel made more than £500,000 from its first year's sales. 'It's a bloody difficult market,' he says, 'because the BBC, ITV and US companies have been dumping their product on the international market for twenty years.'

One way for the smaller independents to manoeuvre themselves into a better position vis-à-vis this market might be to form a satellite relationship with a larger operation, although here the problem is maintaining genuine independence.

Shakespeare Lives!: Daniel Massey.



The Far Pavilions.



Already Goldcrest has, in addition to such contracted producers as Barry Hanson, David Puttnam and Paul Knight, an association with John Gau Productions and Nicholas Barton's Network Television, which is doing *The World, A Television History*. But most other companies would feel with MPC's Ted Barnes that they did not have the resources to cope with such an arrangement. 'What we do is work with independents. They bring an idea to us and we will act as the production company and market it on their behalf.'

The same experience of being swallowed up is also likely to confront the independent seeking to establish a relationship with one of the network companies. It is generally acknowledged that in all areas the old frostiness to independents is thawing. The BBC drama department is currently discussing several 'reverse co-productions' on the model of the deals made with Colin Gregg Productions on *To the Lighthouse* and with Colin Callender's Primetime Productions on *A Captain's Doll*. In each case the outsider secured access to the BBC's facilities and foreign sales rights in the work which his company had developed, in return for bringing in outside finance. Tempest Films is discussing with Harlech Television a six-part comedy series featuring Leonard Rossiter. The Bright Thoughts Company is working out a relationship with Yorkshire Television for its *On Your Way*, Reilly drama, which was commissioned by Channel 4 from Yorkshire-contracted writer Alan Plater.

Such deals are very attractive to independent producers, especially given that the cash shortage at Channel 4 makes it difficult for that network to finance many prestige shows. They are also likely to become more frequent as the companies try to buy back, on the current terms, the talent they have lost to the new channel. Further, the prospect of working with independents is more attractive now that the sector as a whole has not only proved itself capable, but has also brought in high-quality programmes at exceptionally low cost. The disadvantage for the independent is that the network company will be buying a project and engaging attached talent, rather than

commissioning a production from an independent company. But it is likely that the contractual terms available will become increasingly flexible.

Channel 4 would clearly feel very threatened if independent companies were increasingly drawn back into the network fold. As Jacky Stoller says about a series she is setting up with HTV, 'It's a very good idea for them, but I know they don't have the resources.' It has to be said that several factors would prevent a flood of independents away from Channel 4, union resistance among them, but Dukes is nevertheless well aware of the problem. 'We'll go back,' he says, 'and pinch brilliance wherever it is to be found.' He believes that Channel 4's trump card is the desire of independents to escape the claustrophobia of the large television companies, which was part of the motivation behind the Channel Four Group's campaign. Michael Darlow verifies the analysis. 'Many producers feel that the working conditions are much closer to what they wanted, that they are able to choose their staff, make the script they wanted with minimum interference and work in an atmosphere that was what they wanted.'

If the more entrepreneurial sector of the independent community is drawn into productions for the main UK networks, US cable and other major programmers, Channel 4 could become a ghetto in a sense, but also might be freer to develop a distinctive face. Some producers already make the distinction between doing 'art' for Channel 4 and 'commerce' or 'art/commerce' for which one has to go elsewhere. According to Neil Anthony of Bright Thoughts, 'the whole value of Channel 4 is that it will allow experiment and ideas which otherwise wouldn't have that extra bit of fire to surface and happen.' If they were to make sixty sitcom episodes, he says, they might as well go back and do it with LWT.

It would be an enlightened ITCA sector which, instead of complaining about the threat which Channel 4 subscriptions present to their profit margins, accepted the role of the Channel as an outlet for the more experimental ideas of their in-house programme-makers, and a research

and development sector for programmes which might not work on the main network. Several independent producers who were part of the lobby to keep ITV1 as far as possible from its commercial brother already feel the need for strategic planning between the channels akin to that between BBC1 and BBC2. Dukes points out the problem of formulating a consensus between the diverse operations in the commercial sector.

Channel 4 has, in letting some air into British programming, initiated a process in which it will play only a partial role. Assuming the development of new markets in cable, satellite and videograms hungry for product, the current market leaders of the independent sector will increasingly manoeuvre to make their programmes for these lucrative areas. The statutory restrictions on Channel 4 will hold it back from becoming a relevant supplier to these international and ancillary markets. The independents will find themselves in competition with both BBC and ITCA networks, which will increasingly come to see themselves as programme providers for wider markets rather than as programmers of a fixed network service. Channel 4 could, of course, ride roughshod over its statutory obligations in pursuit of larger audiences. But it would play a more valuable role if it made use of its limited resources to provide an outlet for programme-makers whose aspirations had more to do with art and messages than profit. Such a channel would, of course, operate within very straitened resources.

It was reported in the early days of the Channel 4 company that the commissioning editors were depressed at the low level of originality in the scripts submitted. But if the growing pains of Channel 4 have proved one thing, it is that securing a flow of innovative and culturally challenging programme concepts has much more to do with checks and balances than the multiplication of channels operating within a framework of minimum regulation. 'I just think,' says Jack Gold, 'that there is not an unlimited well of ideas and talent and imagination. I wish there were, but I don't see it. There is just enough that is different to keep it interesting and alive.'

Tom Keating on *Painters*.



Mothers by Daughters: Barbara Windsor (right).



ARRIVING AT CANNES at half-time, for the festival's second week, one found only one thing on everyone's mind: the new Palais, its vagaries and eccentricities. Instant folklore could be spotted in the making. There was the story about the woman said to have fainted dead away when she found that she was sharing a lift with a harbour rat—a slightly extreme reaction, one might think, considering the human menagerie on show. Or the one about the BBC buyer hurled bodily over a crush barrier, and gallantly bearing the scars to prove it. Or the one about the British television crew who strayed into some inappropriate area of the building to shoot an interview. In the ensuing fracas, dogs were summoned, and the camera was eventually retrieved bearing the toothmarks of a gigantic hound.

Such yarns might be dismissed as over-reaction to what could euphemistically be called the teething troubles of a new system. The Cannes administration is always convinced, not entirely without reason, that everyone is trying to gate-crash everything, and its response to a building liberally supplied with terraces and walkways, in the South Bank style, was to close most of them off, as well as adding to the paranoia of the timorous

by chaining a number of emergency exits. A certain schizophrenia proclaimed itself immediately, the expansive announcement 'Hall d'Accueil' being flanked by a positive rash of no entry signs. But Cannes is so important that the image it presents of itself, with the view of the cinema it picks up and reflects back at any given moment, reaches out far beyond its immediate environs. The real

PENELOPE HOUSTON

drawback of the new Palais is that it fits a view of the state of the art already quite prevalent enough. It seems an entirely appropriate setting for endless video replays of non-events, the babble and boredom of those banked machines. It serves well enough for features about such things as runaway computers and similar hardware. One of these, John Badham's bouncing *Wargames*, duly surfaced as the closing attraction and looked at home, as other films had not, amid the crushed strawberry seating and bare girdered walls. The festival is so delicately balanced, playing the game of being all

things to all sides of the movie business, that a shift of a few degrees makes its mark. And that the new Palais has sadly achieved.

The jury, in the circumstances, could have raised a flag for another view of what it was all about. They were given a clear lead by the two heavyweight contenders, Bresson and Tarkovsky, who both stated that for them it was the Grand Prix or nothing. Not for them, it seemed, those patronising consolation prizes beloved of juries unable to make up their minds. Neither *L'Argent* nor *Nostalghia* would have been the most popular of winners. Bresson's film was even booed by a section of the audience—a characteristically courteous gesture to a film-maker in his seventies, brought about apparently by the fact that *L'Argent* was supported by Jack Lang's Ministry of Culture and that Jack Lang's daughter plays a modest role in the film. In the event, a pusillanimous jury ducked out, duly fudged up a shared prize for 'creativity' (which Bresson and Tarkovsky then meekly accepted, title contenders diminished to Tweedledum and Tweedledee), and awarded the Grand Prix to an Oriental outsider, Shohei Imamura's *The Ballad of*



Cannes: the new Palais. Photo: Ian Christie.

CANNES FESTIVAL

THE 36TH CANNES Film Festival is the only festival I have ever attended where critics and others spent more time discussing the building and the projection conditions than talking about the films. And for good reason. Jean Bonnet, the representative of the French Government (Chargé de Mission), kept suggesting that the move to the new Palais was similar to that from an old-fashioned Caravelle to a brand new Boeing 747. But if the new Palais was a 747, no one who was at Cannes this year could have been induced to board that plane.

The lifts got stuck; the escalators changed direction every day; nobody knew where anything was. For four days, until vociferous press protest brought about a change of heart, the critics were not allowed into the large Auditorium Lumière but were obliged to see films in the Salle Debussy, where a fifth of the seats had either a partial view of the screen or no view at all and the screen was set so far back that from the rear of the hall it shrank to postage stamp size.

The masking was not correct either, so that the image kept spilling over on the black cloth or, alternatively, there were white strips of naked screen. After four days, the press were duly allowed to see films with the quality folk in the Lumière; better, but still not nearly as good for projection as the lovely if run-down Art Deco 'old' (1947) Palais, now renamed Palais Croisette. And meanwhile further protests came from the basement (here called Level Minus One),

RICHARD ROUD

where the film market people were jammed into a series of windowless plasterboard alleyways. The word one heard most was Kafkaesque, and for once it was not misused.

On 11 May we had another kind of protest. White-coated medical students came in from Nice, Montpellier and else-

where to demonstrate against the new laws governing medical education in France. What has this to do with Cannes? As the students openly declared, the festival was an obvious target to attract press attention, and they had decided to 'block' it for a day. It was a strange sight to see the outside staircase lined with CRS men, with helmets and riot shields, while hundreds of luckless people were trapped for hours inside the building. I don't know whether the students' protest finally helped their cause, but it certainly helped the building, whose New Brutalist aspect was much lightened by the spattering of red paint on one facade. If only they could have used blue and yellow on the other sides, the place might have begun to look like a Festival Palais and not a convention hall in the Ruhr Valley.

Enough. There were some fine films at Cannes, and with the exception of Bresson's *L'Argent* the finest was perhaps Ermanno Olmi's *Cammina Cammina* (which translates as *Keep Walking Keep Walking*). This was yet another of those

Narayama, which must have thanked its lucky stars for such good fortune.

Imamura's film is about a village which practises a rather basic population control by culling the newborn and by despatching those septuagenarians who survive its rigours to a nearby mountain top. The sequence in which the dutiful son hauls his old mother up the slopes, to deposit her in the boneyard among the carrion crows, is sure-fire stuff, the kind of cinema that used to be called 'powerful', as one remembers Kinoshita's equivalent when he filmed the same story back in the 50s. Imamura cuts in many shots of birds and animals, to suggest that all nature is akin. But in the 50s we were all probably more deferential to other cultures, or more gullible about the merely exotic. All too much of *The Ballad of Narayama*, as the villagers cavort and couple, suggests nothing much more than *Cold Comfort Farm* in a Japanese idiom.

Wonderfully, no allowances for age, infirmity or deference to old masters need be made in the case of *L'Argent*. It is not the year's best film by an septuagenarian, or any nonsense of that sort. Based, apparently loosely, on a story by Tolstoy, and filmed with a severity, economy and fineness of touch remarkable

even from its maker, the film constructs an entirely logical chain of events, then, as it were, snips the links by its elliptical treatment. A schoolboy, hard up for pocket money, agrees to pass on a forged note; the shopkeeper slips the note, along with a couple of other forgeries, into a truck driver's payment; the young man is sacked (one slightly shaky link in the chain: surely his lawyer could have done better for him?), and from there it's inexorably down, through a prison sentence and the loss of his wife to some kind of obscurely Bressonian salvation through mass murder. Along the way, an intriguing subplot relates the curious complicity of shopkeeper and shop assistant, and other attitudes to guilt.

Like *Pickpocket*, some of this film is a play of hands: hands receiving banknotes, folding them, tucking them away in purses or wallets; hands turning over letters in the prison censor's office. The money is very tangible, very present; the street banking machine, which features notably in one sequence, at once looks like something Bresson might have invented. As so often, he demonstrates that riveting concentration on the most everyday action somehow transforms its nature without in any way changing it: a

single shot here, for instance, of a fork digging into the earth to turn over potatoes, is at once so breathtaking and so insignificant that if one could precisely explain its function in the scheme of the film one feels one might have penetrated the continuing mystery of Bresson's cinema. (And surely one watches his films with undiminished fascination less for their enigmatic morality of grace and redemption than for the equal enigma of their execution?) The potatoes here are being dug by an elderly woman, a pensioner, eventual victim of the young man who has already killed. 'Are you waiting for a miracle?' he asks as she washes clothes laboriously in the old peasant style in a trough. 'Je n'attends rien,' she answers, with the true Bressonian inevitability. Seconds later, he is picking nuts for her in an orchard. And soon after that, the axe is poised to strike her down. *L'Argent* is spare, disturbing (see the film's abrupt, extraordinary final shot) and implacable: a marvellous film.

Nostalgia is no film to see with a heavy cold, which was another of the standard tribulations at Cannes this year. Where Bresson tautens, Tarkovsky stretches: most dialogue seems a lugubrious monotone, most walking is taken



L'Argent: Christian Patey.



Cammina Cammina.

films made in two versions—four and a quarter hours for television and two and three-quarter hours for the cinema. Always a pity, but it none the less seemed to suffer less from being cut down than did Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*. Of all the important directors of our time (and that he certainly is), Olmi has had one of the strangest careers. After initial success with his charmingly neo-neo-realist films like *Il Posto* (twenty-two years ago!) and *I Fidanzati*, his popularity slumped with the 'Pope' film *A Man Named John*. For years afterwards, the only place you could see such wonderful works as *During the Summer* or *La Circonstanza* was at festivals or on television. Then in 1978 came the surprise when he walked off with the Cannes Grand Prix for *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, and it looked as though he was back in favour. But *Cammina Cammina* is his first film since then, and it was not ecstatically received.

It is a surprising film from Olmi, who has always been thought of as a Catholic

director; more surprising in that it has been condemned by the Vatican and banned by the Italian censorship for anyone under 14. The pretext was the crudity of the language, but anyone who has ever seen an Olmi film would know this could not be the real reason, and indeed it was not. The content is religious (the Journey of the Magi); the attitude unorthodox. Set in the present, the film shows a group of peasants (all non-professionals, of course) getting into their costumes for a pageant play about the three wise men and those who followed them to Bethlehem. The first 'heresy' is when a little boy asks one of the priests why he is about to kill an innocent lamb. A woman has sinned, the priest explains, and the lamb will be sacrificed to wash away her sins. But why should the lamb have to pay, asks the boy, why not the woman? This may not sound earth-shaking to the non-Catholic, but it seems to strike at the whole concept of Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God who bears away our sins. Olmi clearly believes that we

should each be responsible for our own transgressions. And he declared himself against all 'churches'—economic, political, whatever—which mankind has used to avoid taking responsibility for its actions. Worse was to come. When they all arrive at Bethlehem, someone asks if they can be sure that the baby is the Messiah, and the reply from one of the Magi is that they will simply have to act as if he were. At this point, there is only room for certainties.

It's a long film, and I kept asking myself why I wasn't becoming bored, as the trek to Bethlehem continued. But Olmi is quite simply one of the finest directors alive, and one becomes passionately involved in his story, his characters, and perhaps even more in what he is trying to say. In a way, the film is closest to that strangest of Virginia Woolf's novels, *Between the Acts*, which is also the story of a pageant, except for the fact that the organiser of the pageant is here off screen, as it were. But the film is on the same exalted level of ambition.

at a pace which would shame a self-respecting snail. (The heroine, at one moment, does essay a running jump at a flight of steps; she promptly trips over, and the slow march is resumed.) Tarkovsky might seem almost to have scuppered his film, or our confidence of understanding it, by his own comments: culture, he argues, doesn't travel, translation may be positively dangerous, because it allows the illusion of comprehension. So we are at two removes, watching his Russian vaguely researching the record of a composer compatriot and at the same time in sad pursuit of the Absolute, in an Italy not of sunshine and spirit but of mists and melancholy. Tarkovsky might have first encountered such damp Italian skies in something like Antonioni's *Il Grido*; certainly he pays tribute to Antonioni, and at moments to Resnais. There are effects in the film which could only be achieved by a master in full assurance of his power, including the first and last shots. But in general the variations on states of melancholy (for a Russian, 'nostalgia' also apparently relates to absence from country), the images of water and decay, suggest that the alien setting has not stretched the director but turned him in upon himself.

The film demands a concentration I wasn't able to give it; but first impressions, seldom that far adrift, are that Tarkovsky, in terms of his own favourite element, may be treading water.

After the giants, the rest. The attractive *The South* is, remarkably, Victor Erice's first film since *The Spirit of the Beehive* almost a decade ago; and it takes up near enough where that film left off to suggest that its director is mining a narrow seam of possibly autobiographical material. Again, there's a Spanish provincial family (enigmatic father, practical mother, sensitive, inquisitive little girl), and again the local cinema, in this case a splendid survival in itself, becomes a source of revelation. The South is the south of Spain, a sort of forbidden territory from which relatives come to visit and for which the girl, now a teenager, finally sets out. Erice is very adroit, as in his first film, at conveying a kind of complicity between actors, feeling for the family as a unit, the appeal of small, half-manufactured mysteries; he is a director who has been away too long.

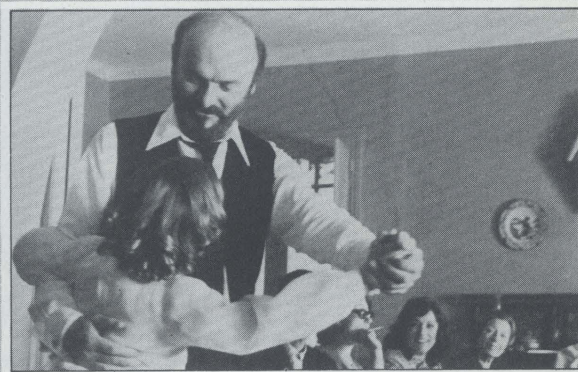
Claude Goretta's *The Death of Mario Ricci* is also essentially a European small town film—not to be confused with the American brand, though Goretta comes a

little closer to that than many. The place, in this case, is one of those comfortable, sprawling Swiss villages where the cattle trot home in the evening and the streets echo to the sound of their bells. A television journalist (Gian Maria Volonte) arrives to interview a pundit on world food shortages; in the course of waiting for an interview which goes wrong, he uncovers the *other* story in the village—the fatal road accident which despatched a young workman. In another location, the film might be nothing much, but Goretta's watchful annotation of tensions and discomforts in this green, quiet setting makes it a very Swiss film: milk chocolate with quite a firm centre.

On the same day, we had two melodramatic studies of the Far East. Peter Weir's *The Year of Living Dangerously* begins promisingly, with a young Australian radio reporter (Mel Gibson) arriving in Indonesia on his first assignment abroad in the year of the Sukarno government's collapse. He's befriended by a wily, philosophical dwarf cameraman (most people only realised after seeing the film that this part was played by an American actress, Linda Hunt) and joins a press corps rather reminiscent of the one in *The Honourable Schoolboy*. The



Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence: Tom Conti.



The South.

If Olmi's latest work was a triumph, the much awaited new film by Oshima, *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, was something less. No one could deny that this story of life in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Java in 1942 was very well done. Based on a novel by Laurens van der Post called *The Seed and the Sower*, this British/Japanese/New Zealand co-production was the favourite for the Grand Prix throughout the festival, especially with the French, but it ended up getting nothing. And I think I can see why. Although Oshima is a highly accomplished director, and although David Bowie, Tom Conti and Takeshi Ryuichi were all excellent, there was something broken-backed about the script. If the film was about Japanese brutality, that could have been got over in half an hour. But it also seemed to be about the difference between British (and Dutch) views on homosexuality and those of the Japanese. The film begins with a Japanese guard forced to commit hara kiri because he has sodomised a Dutch pris-

oner (who himself is condemned for not even trying to resist); the main thrust, however, is the love or passion that springs up on the part of the camp commandant for the David Bowie character. How the Englishman feels about all this is never made clear, and the flashbacks about how he mistreated his hunch-backed little brother don't help much, especially as half the audience were not even aware that the brother was supposed to be hunchbacked. In other words the film just didn't add up.

An honourable failure, however, which is more than could be said for Yilmaz Güney's French film *The Wall*. (I say French, because it was made in France, with French money, much of it put up by Jack Lang's Ministry of Culture, and with a half-French crew.) This, too, is a movie about prison life, and after fifteen minutes we all got the picture: Turkish jails are terrible places and the prisoners are atrociously treated. Then the film goes remorselessly on, saying the same thing over and over again

for another hour and three-quarters. Güney's admirers seemed to take the view that it was something he had to get out of his system; admirers of *Yol* took a different tack, the new view being that *Yol* owed a great deal to Serif Goren, its official director. Be that as it may, Güney's denunciation of fascist brutality might have sat easier if one hadn't read about some of the methods he used in making it. When he couldn't get one of the twelve-year-old boys to cry, Güney admitted that he first tried slapping him, and when that didn't work told the boy his mother had just died suddenly. That did the trick, Güney said. But it seems to me that a director capable of such an action is hardly better than the prison guards he is condemning.

Perhaps the best national selection at Cannes came from the Hungarians, whose competition entry was Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács' *Forbidden Relations* (ex-*The Recidivists*). Though ostensibly a film about incest (half-brother and half-sister), its real subject, it seemed to me,

sense of someone trying to learn his job under the pressure of baffling Oriental tensions is encouraging: Ambler, Greene and Le Carré have marked out this ground. Peter Weir, however, rather fudges it, the film revealing itself as having nowhere particular to go. Ann Hui's *The Boat People* doesn't make that mistake: it keeps moving through the story of a Japanese photo-journalist, on assignment in the Vietnam of a few years ago, who becomes embroiled in the affairs of a poor family and predictably discovers despair and brutality beneath the smiling surface of propaganda. Subversives, it is suggested, are put to clearing minefields; a way of disposing of both the mines and the subversives. Given its subject, the film could not but be arresting, though most people felt that the rather hectoring B-picture style of address inspired less than total conviction.

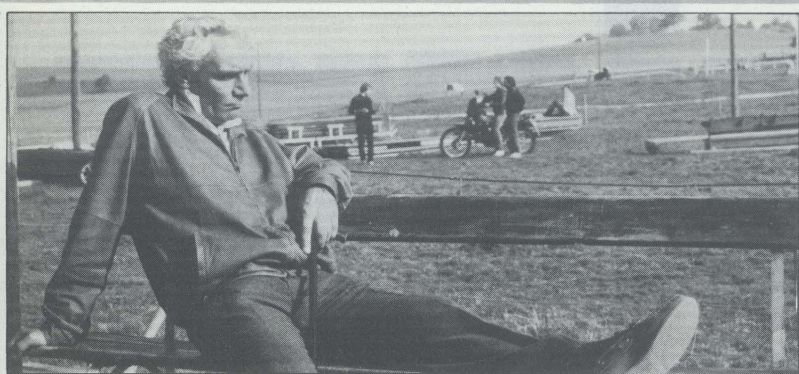
The Chinese *The Herdsman*, the story of a victim of the Cultural Revolution who is eventually given the chance of emigration to America, and duly rejects it, was discussed by Kevin Tierney in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND. Xie Jin's film is plainly old-fashioned, expansive and confident and smug, like a distant

echo of a Hollywood backwoods movie of thirty years ago in which the hero opts to remain poor but honest. If he did show any signs of backsliding one could be sure that his wife, a kind of Chinese Loretta Young, would come up with the appropriate homily. Still, it was salutary to be reminded, from this source, of what the path of virtue in the cinema once looked like.

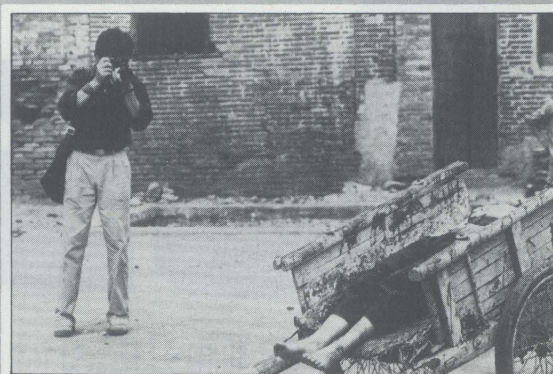
Britain, one ought to report, did well if not sensationally, with the Monty Python award (accepted, I thought, with an admirably phlegmatic incredulity by those concerned), *Heat and Dust* also in competition, two films in the Directors' Fortnight, and round the clock screenings by Goldcrest of films seen or about to be seen on Channel 4. The two Quinzaine films, *Local Hero* and *Another Time, Another Place*, must have given audiences the notion that the much discussed British renaissance mainly concerns Scotland, still widely regarded as a colonised if not positively Third World country, remote from what the French used to call the studios 'de sa majesté'. *Another Time, Another Place*, directed by Mike Radford and produced by Simon Perry, keeps its end up very well. About the impact of Italian POWs on a remote

Scottish farming community, it has an appropriate raw-boned harshness, and a scrubbed and shining performance of great integrity from Phyllis Logan.

A small treat of the festival was *The Man in the Silk Hat*, the second film that Maud Linder has devoted to her father, the great Max. A biography through extracts, rather than just a compilation film, it's crammed with enticing footage, much of it recognised as rare even by experts in Linder's work. In stills, Linder looks so dandified, so much the perfect patent leather man, that one forgets the gentle, often ineffectual tone his jesting could assume, along with its inventiveness. The plums here include two beautifully daft episodes with cows, another involving a wig which the distraught hero can't keep from falling like a curtain over his face, and a sublime adventure with a bath. In the background, glimpsed over the actors' shoulders, there is the sense of early 20th century life in progress, that bonus of actuality which comes with so much of the great silent comedy. Maud Linder has done her father proud, and if the TV companies had any representatives still on their feet, one hopes that somebody has snapped up this engaging tribute. □



The Death of Mario Ricci: Gian Maria Volonte.



The Boat People.

was any kind of love that is frowned upon by society. Its star, Lili Monori, is extraordinary: an actress who is more than plain, who when examined feature by feature is almost ugly, but who can somehow make herself look like the most beautiful and desirable of women. The result is that one believes in the overwhelming nature of the love her half-brother feels for her, and in their insistence, against the law and society, in continuing to live together and to have two children, even though they both know that eventually they will have to face prison.

The Hungarians also showed two fascinating films out of competition. Gyula Gazdag's *Lost Illusions* was an updating of the second half of Balzac's novel of the same name to Budapest in 1968, with some very accurate satire on the organisation of the magazine that features in the story. The other film was *The Revolt of Job*, co-directed by Imre Gyöngyössi and Barna Kabay. This tells the strange story of an elderly Jewish couple, all

seven of whose children have died young. The year is 1942, the old man knows he has not long to live before he is taken off to a concentration camp, but he wants to leave his possessions to someone and so he adopts a seven-year-old Christian boy from an orphanage. The boy is unruly; the Jewish neighbours are scandalised, but the old man holds firm. The child has to be a Christian, complete with a certificate of baptism, or he too might be doomed to the camps. A little sentimental, and according to some Hungarians a trifle too rose-coloured, but I found it an affecting and charming work.

Also much appreciated was Alain Tanner's *In the White City*, which surfaced at one of Cannes' invaluable market screenings. It stars Bruno Ganz, but the real star is Lisbon, where Ganz jumps ship to wander around this strangest of cities. It could be objected that the film, made without a script, has either too much plot or too little. But what lingers in the mind long after one has seen it are its qualities, not its defects—the superb

performance by Ganz; the atmosphere of the white city.

Finally—for what could top it?—Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*. When everyone was amazed that the Americans won nothing this year at Cannes, for the first time in living memory, they forgot Monty Python, which is at least American financed. I had hoped that the title referred to Professor Joad's remark on a Brains Trust programme. When asked 'What is the meaning of life?' Joad simply replied, 'It all depends what you mean by of.' The humour of Terry Jones' film is not quite on that exalted level, but the *Sperm Song*, with its unusual view of the difference between Catholic and Protestant attitudes to birth control, was a show stopper, as was the sex education lecture in a public school. The gang perhaps are better when they have some plot or clothes-line to hang their jokes on, rather than this collection of sketches. Still, everyone had a good time, which is more than you can say for most festival films. ■



The new Andropov slogan: Honour and Glory to Work!

Russians

IAN CHRISTIE and RICHARD TAYLOR are compiling a source-book on the pre war Soviet cinema and recently were guests of Goskino on a research visit to Moscow and Yerevan. Here,

Ian Christie

contributes a personal report and interviews three key film-makers

When Lenin identified the cinema as 'for us, the most important of all the arts', he doubtless saw a convenient simultaneous solution to the urgent needs of propaganda, entertainment and taxation (cinema had obvious social attractions as an alternative to the lucrative Tsarist vodka monopoly). But he could hardly have foreseen the extent to which his words have become literally the emblem of Soviet cinema, emblazoned on almost every building connected with the film industry, like the ubiquitous portraits of their author in executive offices. There's a particularly fine mural version on the huge Rossiya Cinema in Moscow; and, for collectors, an exotic version in Armenian running the length of the Armenfilm Studios outside Yerevan. There's probably a master example somewhere in the

labyrinth of Mosfilm Studios too, although what strikes the visitor more is how the giant stills everywhere from innumerable films about Lenin, from *October* onwards, merge to form a kind of photographic Bayeux Tapestry, displaying history as it should have looked.

Traversing the endless corridors that make up Mosfilm—'just like your Pinewood,' said the Director of International Relations encouragingly, 'except that we keep examples of all military equipment from the Civil War onwards'—it feels like a vast time machine, dedicated to re-creating the legendary past, as in the splendid back-lot Montparnasse built for Yutkevich's recent *Lenin in Paris*. Another kind of past, metaphysical perhaps, was under reconstruction on the set of Vladimir Basov's *Time and the Con-*

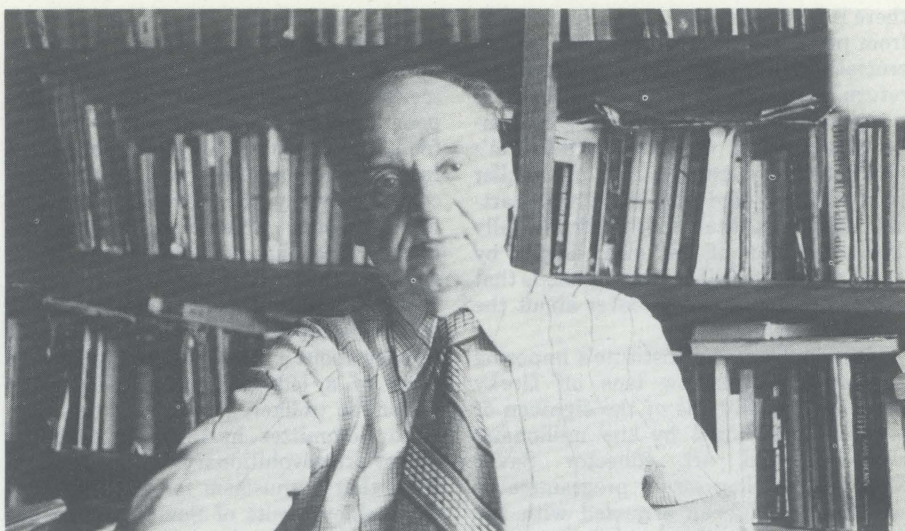
ways, which featured an uncharacteristically jovial portrait of Priestley, beaming down over the last day's shooting from the chimneybreast. Basov was clearly delighted to be able to explain to a British visitor: 'We think of Priestley as a fatalist, so we followed the principle that tragic actors are usually comedians in their private lives and used a smiling portrait as a kind of in-joke.' Priestley, it seems, has joined that select group of authors, which includes Galsworthy, Shaw, Wells and, more improbably, Chesterton, whose critical reputation in Britain seems to be in inverse ratio to their popularity in the Soviet Union.

But of course paradox and time warp are the very stuff of Western encounters with Soviet reality; and indeed the main purpose of our visit was to explore the

legendary past of the Soviet cinema at first hand. We wanted to meet the surviving veterans, view rare films and documents, talk to historians and critics, and compare our developing view of prewar Soviet cinema with theirs. Surprisingly little Western research in this field has even attempted to make use of the basic resources of historical research. For this purpose, we were to inaugurate an exchange programme between the British Film Institute and the Institute for the History of Cinema Art in Moscow, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Film (Goskino); and I was also to spend a week viewing new films for a survey season due to begin a UK tour at the National Film Theatre in July.

Our unofficial host was Leonid Trauberg, the veteran co-director of *New Babylon*, who'd been the BFI's guest in London for the presentation of his film with its original Shostakovich score. We knew that Trauberg was something of a living legend, with an astonishing memory, but the scope of his interests and his unflagging energy at over 80 still came as a surprise. As chairman of a commission set up by the Film-makers Association to establish a central cinema museum (along similar lines to the BFI's planned Museum of the Moving Image), he still spends most afternoons working at the union's offices in the House of Cinema (Dom Kino), besides chairing guest lectures and taking part in debates about new films. Over dinner at Dom Kino on our first evening, he was summoned to join a group celebrating the completion of a new film by Ilya Frez, one of his many successful former students from the days when he taught scriptwriting and direction alongside Mikhail Romm and the other prewar masters.

It was in the company of Trauberg and his lifelong friend Yutkevich that we visited the House of Cinema Veterans at Matveyevskoye, near Mosfilm, which accommodates some forty 'full-time' residents and an equal number of still-active veterans on a part-time basis. The elegant new building, festooned with indoor plants, puts most of Moscow's hotels to shame; and on the initiative of its chairman, the film historian Sergei Komarov, the walls are decorated with an astonishing array of paintings, sculptures and even tapestries by graduating



Leonid Trauberg in his study.

fine art students, many on film themes. We had hoped to meet two of the most distinguished residents, Khokhlova and Medvedkin, but in the short time available, our unexpected encounters proved equally interesting.

Boris Wolff was introduced as the oldest veteran: he had started working in the cinema in 1915 and, three years later, had had the extraordinary luck to buy a pile of film cans along with a projector, salvaged from a hospital in Petrograd which the Americans had started building in 1916, but abandoned after the Revolution. When he took the reels to a friendly cinema owner, he was told, 'My friend, you've just acquired Griffith's *Intolerance*!' And thus, we were assured by all, appeared that seminal influence on the young Soviet cinema. Also on hand were Ludmilla Semyonova, who played the lead in Room's *Bed and Sofa* and had a small, though vivid, part as the cigar-smoking cabaret singer in *New Babylon*; and Nina Lee, introduced by Komarov as 'a real silent movie star', who enjoyed a brief and spectacular career as 'the Russian Mary Pickford', in such films as Gardin's *Cross and Mauser*.

A valuable insight into the contrast between the silent and sound periods was provided by the Leningrad cinematographer, Vyacheslav Gordanov, who had worked regularly with Petrov from 1929. He recalled the stylistic influence of German expressionist cinema and, especially,

the practical impact of Balazs' writings. 'We took what we could from him and threw away the rest; I still have his books upstairs in my room.' On the transition to sound: 'We had a lot of regrets because we had to do everything in a different way. Our cinema was damaged by having to learn all over again and the work became less interesting; what I had previously done with one or two brief shots of 10 or 15 metres now became an 80 metre monologue in, for instance, Gerasimov's *Masquerade*. So we had to find a different solution and make the camera move.' Gordanov also confirmed how little contact there had been with foreign cinema during the 30s. 'We were very bad tempered at that time and we had to learn everything for ourselves.'

It was clear even from our brief conversations that there is important and urgent work to be done interviewing the veterans of early Soviet cinema, to fill out the 'official' history. And if this has been neglected until recently, there is at least evidence of a growing interest: Evgeny Gromov, deputy director and head of the Institute's foreign department, enthusiastically told us of his own research on Kuleshov and how this had led him to re-evaluate the importance of pre-revolutionary directors like Protazanov and Bauer. It became clear from this and other conversations that, after decades of insisting on the autonomy and originality of the young Soviet cinema,

Ludmilla Semyonova, past and present.



Boris Wolff, Sergei Komarov, Vyacheslav Gordanov.



there is a new emphasis on the continuity from pre-revolutionary times and on the crucial role of Protazanov, after his return from exile in 1923, in building up a popular Soviet cinema. During his conversations with Golovnya, Pudovkin's celebrated cameraman, for an earlier book, Gromov had also made the startling discovery that Lily Brik actually directed a film of her own, helped by Golovnya—proof, if it were needed, that there is still much to discover about the legendary 20s and 30s.

Meanwhile, at the Institute's imposing building on a narrow lane off Gorky Street—originally one of the eighteen or so mansions owned by the millionaire merchant and art collector Savva Morozov—an impressive programme of screenings had been arranged with the help of the state film archive, Gosfilmofond. A first priority was to see as many as possible of the immediate post-revolutionary 'agit-films'. We saw eight titles ranging from 1919-21, all restored to remarkably good condition and surprisingly complex in their narrative forms. Gardin's two films, *Hunger* and *Sickle and Hammer*, during which Pudovkin graduated from actor to co-director, were ambitious dramas that illustrated the desperate food shortages of the period with interpolated documentary material, while urging greater co-operation between city workers and country peasants, and showed the demonology of corrupt kulaks making an early appearance.

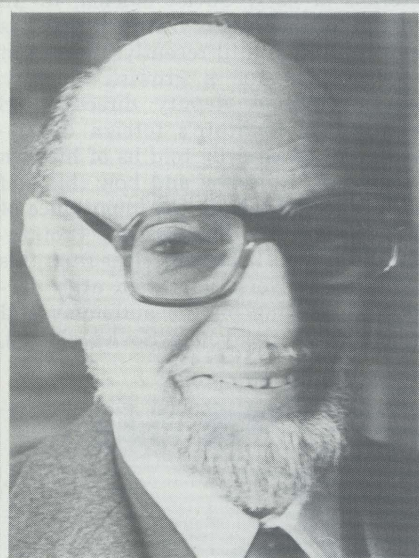
Quite unexpected were the narrative complexities of Ivanovsky's *Children Teach Their Elders*, which intercut scenes of Renaissance skulduggery with a poor family's frantic attempts to find food, linked (just) by their daughter's reading from a story book and further complicated by the father's dreams of final disaster. Equally bold were the French Revolution and Karl Marx tableaux that introduced *Workers of the World Unite* and the grotesque comedy of *The Dream of Taras*, a Chaplinesque fantasy about a soldier deserting into the arms of a lady of easy virtue—made under the unlikely auspices of the Mos-Kino Committee in 1919! As with the earlier pre-revolutionary period, it would seem that enthusiasm for the first 'official' achievements of Soviet cinema has tended to obscure the richness and diversity of its immediate ancestry.

Viktor Shklovsky, the venerable *enfant terrible* of modernist literature and cinema, had just celebrated his 90th birthday with a lively television performance that had made a poignant impression on many. Sadly, he was not well enough to receive a visit, but we were able to see two quite remarkable films that he scripted. *The Gadfly* was a silent adaptation of a very popular novel set in 19th century Italy by the English-born E. Wojnicz (née Lillian Bush); and Shklovsky, the champion of Stevenson and Sterne, clearly delighted in its welter of adventure, coincidence and sizzling melodrama, as the illegitimate son of a

Cardinal returns from the dead to lead a Young Italy terrorist group. I was reminded of Shklovsky's support for the Serapion Brothers group, with their 'dynamic literature of adventures and strong passions', and his constant warnings against the 'over-regulation' of art which would eliminate its vital essence. His script for an early sound film, *The House of the Dead* (1932), on the other hand, virtually amounted to a critical dissertation on Dostoevsky. It is ostensibly a dramatised biography, and the use of a professorial prologue and epilogue, together with frequent shifts of time and place, give it a chinese-box quality that seemed the equal of some of his boldest experiments in prose construction. Obviously Shklovsky's scriptwriting was far above the hack-work that he often dismissed it as.

Among other rarities, Room's *Severe Young Man* (1935) stood out as an astonishing attempt to marry a debate on the ethics of privilege for 'specialists' with a florid Art Deco style that would have put contemporary Hollywood to shame. The film was never released and both Olesha, the writer, and Room suffered severe displeasure. But our concern wasn't only to see 'banned' films: on the contrary, we were more interested in the genuinely popular work that emerged in the 30s as the result of both official pressure and intense self-criticism by certain established directors, like Kozintsev and Trauberg, Ermler, Pudovkin and younger film-makers like Raizman.

Yuli Raizman



We met Yuli Raizman in his offices at Mosfilm, where he supervises the Third Production Group and keeps up a busy schedule of international travel and press interviews. Now approaching his 80th birthday, he was pleased to hear of plans for a major retrospective of his work at the NFT. 'The Americans are going to show three: *Katorga* (*Penal Servitude*), *The Last Night* and *Private Life*—the beginning, middle and end of

my career!' Raizman had started work in the literary department of the Mezhrabpom (now Gorky) Studios in the mid-20s and soon became assistant to Yakov Protazanov on two films—by coincidence, one of these, *The Trial of the Three Million*, had been on television a few days before and everyone agreed how well it had stood up to the passage of time. I wondered how Raizman remembered Protazanov.

'He was a charming and witty man, more interesting than his films might suggest; but he had no wish to talk abstractly about art and gave few interviews.' We had learned elsewhere that Protazanov was in fact a major shareholder in the Mezhrabpom Studios. He had started directing films in 1909 after a short career as an actor and in the years immediately before the Revolution was particularly associated with the series of films that made Mozhukhin the most popular Russian star. What had Raizman learned from him about handling actors?

'The actors were always the most important element for him. He advised me to expect to have to compromise on many things in film-making, but never to begin shooting until I was satisfied that the actors understood their roles. Of course he got great performances from some of the most famous stage actors of the day, although the playing is rather conventional in some of his films.'

'After the Revolution, Protazanov worked for four years in France and Germany and only returned in 1923 to make *Aelita*, which was one of the first of our films to hold its own against the tide of foreign material flooding our screens at the time. He was invaluable at this time: before Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, there was Protazanov, a complete professional.' It's difficult not to apply this same verdict to Raizman himself, and indeed it was Protazanov who gave him his first chance to direct, by offering him a film that he had agreed to make for a new company (*The Circle*, for Gosvoenkino, 1927).

I told Raizman how impressed I'd been by the fluent use of long tracking shots in his first sound film, *Flyers* (1935), which reminded me of the most advanced American style of the late 30s. 'Despite the rare opportunities to see foreign films, from my point of view the 30s was the most fruitful period for Soviet cinema. This was the time when great events began to be portrayed through their effect on the lives of individual people. At least this was my approach in a film like *The Last Night* (which deals with the night of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Moscow), in contrast to that of Dzigan in *We from Kronstadt*, which uses characters and events as symbols. I was and still am more interested in the fate of ordinary people.'

Which of his twenty films does he now

So we saw the first part of K&T's *Maxim* trilogy, an imaginative fusion of 'typage' with the new vein of romantic realism; Ermiler's first sound film, *Counterplan* (which also drew on Yutkevich's sound experience in *The Golden Mountains*), Raizman's Hawksian *Flyers* and the 'first' Soviet musical, Savchenko's *Accordion*, which has a fresh charm and technical inventiveness in its staging that even the aftermath of jolly *kolkhoz* musicals can't obliterate. Another novelty was the film that far outstripped *Potemkin* at the box-office, *The Bear's Wedding*, written by Lunacharsky, then Commissar of Enlightenment, and featuring his actress wife. This turned out to be a splendidly melodramatic variation on the classic vampire tale, co-directed by and starring Konstantin Eggert—who, Trauberg gleefully told us, was subsequently inundated with offers from women to become his victims.

We had been invited to visit one of the national republics and it seemed that Armenia was on offer, so one night we set off on the three-hour flight to Yerevan, with our interpreter and Goskino official making up a delegation. The basic organisational structure of Soviet cinema is faithfully reproduced in each republic; so Armenia has its mini-Goskino, responsible for all production, distribution, exhibition, cinema building and delegations, which requires a staff of about fifty. Actual production personnel belong to the local Film-makers Association,



'For us, the most important of all the arts': Armenfilm Studios, outside Yerevan.

which negotiates an annual production plan with the Goskino. Armenia, with a population of about three million, one-third of whom live in Yerevan, makes an average of ten films a year, six or seven of these contracted by television.

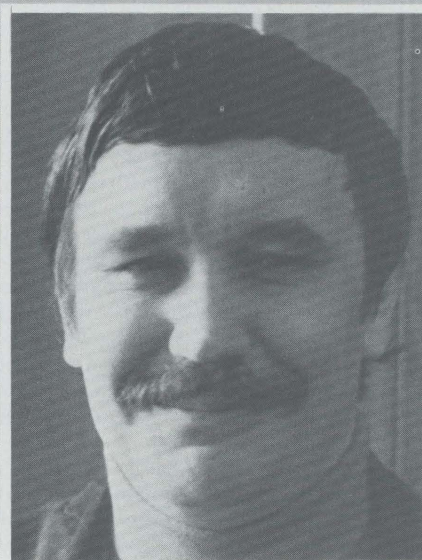
Conversation with the Union officials got off to a good start on the founder of Armenian cinema, Bek-Nazarov, several of whose films I'd seen; faltered when I inquired if there were any women film-makers in Armenia; and only revived when the First Secretary asked if I knew

the Armenian restaurant in Edinburgh (I did), whose proprietor he described as 'a great patriot'. From a hasty sampling of recent production, one film stood out as a bold departure from the prevailing canons of socialist realism with local colour. *Cry of the Peacock*, by two young film-makers, Babayan and Dovlatyan (the former already noted for a short based on Ray Bradbury's *Eighth Day of Creation*), turned out to be a stylish essay in late-romantic anomie, brilliantly visualised and making eclectic use of

find most interesting? 'There are different criteria to apply: films which were popular with audiences and films which I personally found successful. I saw *What If It Is Love* (1961) recently and liked it. I also like *The Last Night*, *Mashenka* (1942), *Communist* (1957) and *Your Contemporary* (1968)—in general I prefer the more intimate and chamber-like of my films.' And the new film he is preparing? 'I'm working with the same writer as on *Private Life*, Anatoly Grebnev, and after that film about a man suddenly forced to take stock of the meaning of his life when he's retired from his important job, we want to make a film this time about a woman. She belongs to that very special generation that grew up after the war. When our country lost so many men in the war, millions of women were condemned to remain lonely. It took great strength to survive. So I want to tell a story about one such remarkable, yet ordinary woman.'

Raizman's group at Mosfilm produces seven or eight films each year, 'more or less, depending on the quality of the scripts we get.' I wondered which of the younger film-makers in his group he felt held most promise for the future? 'Abdrashitov,' came the immediate answer. 'He entered my group straight from VGIK (the film school) and he's now working on his fifth film, still with the same writer, and I think getting better with each film.'

Vadim Abdrashitov



'We thought our last two films would be of interest only to domestic audiences, because they deal with problems that are peculiar to our society. We never thought they would be understood abroad. Yet *Foxhunting* attracted favourable attention at the San Remo Festival and *The Train Has Stopped* was well received at a recent showing in West Germany. I don't really understand this interest yet, but it's very gratifying.'

Vadim Abdrashitov makes an immediate impression as a modest and deeply committed director, genuinely surprised at his growing reputation, yet aware of his solid achievement in making four significant films, all with the same script-writer. They weren't planned as a series, he insisted, one film had just led to another; and clearly Raizman had played a part in nurturing the Abdrashitov-Mindadze partnership.

He had been a physicist, working in industry for five years, before he decided to change career and enter VGIK. 'I was lucky to be in Mikhail Romm's last group before his death: he didn't really teach, but talked freely about his own experience and ideas, and encouraged us always to concentrate on the ideas in a script and let the form look after itself. When I graduated in 1974, I was lucky to be assigned to Raizman's group at Mosfilm and through him I was introduced to Alexander Mindadze, then only twenty-six, with whom I've worked ever since. All Mindadze's scripts are original, not adaptations, and over the years we have developed a common language. After he produces a draft based on our conversations, I start to pick it apart and gradually we hammer out what is essential to the film. We always have to demolish the first script in this way; it's the cruel law of cinematography and there's no other way.'

Abdrashitov's account of their working

medieval Armenian music. It had been the subject of furious controversy, we gathered, and was seen by many as an important declaration of at least aesthetic independence.

Nothing on Armenian screens could quite equal the exquisite contents of the Scriptorium that overlooks Yerevan, housing the surviving canon of early Armenian illuminated manuscripts and printed books. We had to be content with the exterior of the Armenfilm studios, which were mysteriously closed for 'remont' (like so many other buildings on our travels); but a visit to the giant Rossiya cinema in the centre of Yerevan on a Saturday night, in time to see its three auditoria (1,500, 1,000 and 240) fill up, drove home the message that cinema here is still very much a spectator sport. The cinema runs nineteen shows each day, from 10 am to midnight, averages 10,000–11,000 admissions daily, with an annual total of four million, and charges a mere 40–50 kopecks (about 40p at the official exchange rate, lower in real terms). Despite assurances to the contrary, we had the impression that recent tightening-up on absenteeism might be reducing attendances. But for me the most impressive feature of this vast cinema complex was a fully-staffed twelve-hour-a-day crèche for the use of parents visiting the cinema.

Back in Moscow, an eagerly awaited visit to the Eisenstein Museum, which was actually his wife's small apartment in an



The Eisenstein museum: (above) Naum Kleiman, *Potemkin* poster, Ian Christie. (Left) Eisenstein's wall: Léger and Meyerhold. (Right) A microcosm of his intellectual world.

obscure district of Moscow. There Naum Kleiman, secretary of the Film-makers Association Commission on the Eisenstein Heritage, keeps house (literally) and dispenses refreshment and erudition. This is no tourist museum, but the nerve-centre of a network of Eisenstein studies that covers the world. It is also a microcosm of his intellectual world: the books that line every wall surface are a fraction of his original collection;

method fits the films exactly. The two latest that I've seen have a quality of economy and compression that could only result from meticulous planning and a clear sense of priorities. It's obvious why their work appeals to Raizman, yet the tone is sharper and more disturbing, appropriately for young men surveying their contemporaries. What is unique in all the recent Soviet cinema that I'm familiar with is that they touch on some of the most sensitive moral dilemmas in an increasingly affluent and often uncaring society, as Abdrashitov's own description of their second film, *The Turning*, makes clear.

'The main characters are members of the intelligentsia, our present-day heroes. They are typical of a certain generation and social stratum: a young scientist and his newly-married wife. At the beginning of the film, everything is fine for them; they are in love and at the start of their careers. Then they are thrown into a critical situation. They are driving back to Moscow after their honeymoon when they knock down an old woman, who later dies from her injuries. The ensuing problems of conscience are in some ways quite traditional—you will find them in Dostoevsky, for instance—but our concern is that in the contemporary situation, this young couple will, without compunction, overstep the moral mark. They offer presents and expensive restaurant meals to witnesses, so that they will

give favourable evidence in court and, as a result, they are acquitted. But it is a Pyrrhic victory, because they then have to discover how to go on living with their burden of guilt.'

In the next film, *Foxhunting*, a similar situation is the starting point for a very different exploration. A worker refuses to accept a bribe from a wealthy family to change his evidence against their son, who is accused of mugging; and he's disgusted to see how the court treats very differently this boy and another from a poorer background. But gradually he is drawn towards their different worlds and begins to lose interest in his main passion, the sport of 'foxhunting', a kind of electronic orienteering in which contestants use radio receivers to locate a hidden transmitter.

'The hero of *Foxhunting* is not an intellectual and in the course of the film he comes to question the standards that he's always accepted unquestioningly. By the end he's discovered that life is more complicated than he realised and, in the final sequence, when he takes off the headphones and runs off into the forest, there is hope for him: he has started to listen to reality and think for himself. The problems posed in our films are all to do with what is, in a sense, spiritual for each person and his moral environment, which is neither good nor bad, but always compromised.'

I was intrigued by the way that the

audience's expectations are frustrated in the course of *The Train Has Stopped*, when it gradually becomes clear that a journalist involved in the rail crash that opens the film is neither a seeker after truth, nor the central character (although it was one of the last roles played by the late Anatoly Solonitsyn). Was this a deliberate ploy to throw the viewer off balance?

'If you compare the last two films, there is certainly more strategy in *The Train Has Stopped*. From a director's



The Train Has Stopped.



signed celebrity photographs, English and French caricatures, a Léger painting cover the remaining spaces; pre-Columbian figurines and maquettes stand on top of the bookshelves. Even the small-talk of introductions and gossip about his private life take on an air of discovery in that unique setting. And books on Eisenstein flood in from every corner of the globe: Kleiman was particularly complimentary about Peter Wollen's essay in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* and offered us valuable advice on the Eisenstein material for our book.

Before being 'handed over' by the Institute to Goskino, for the screenings of new films, a seminar on the current state of British cinema was called for by the Foreign Department. About forty of the Institute's several hundred research staff attended; and what clearly interested them most was news of the impact of video-recorders (still virtually unknown in the Soviet Union) and the curious notion of 'independent' production. A thin diet of unenterprising Moscow Festival selections and such current releases as *Death on the Nile* and *Silver Dream* Racer has left even Soviet specialists sadly unaware of recent trends in British cinema—although one researcher had made a special study of the MacCabe-McArthur debate on 'realism' in *Screen*...

The results of viewing over 30 new Soviet films will be on show at the NFT in July and thereafter in various regional

cinemas, in similar fashion to the 1980 season. What this selection suggests is a strong climate of stocktaking and self-examination, which is apparent in almost all films of any ambition. This tendency has perhaps three identifiable components at present. One consists of rather rueful comments on the problems of muddling through in everyday life. These range from such relatively subdued, though razor-sharp, comedies as Mikaelyan's *Love by Request* and Frez's *You Wouldn't Dream of It* (which combines the two great preoccupations of divorce and child-rearing), to the more manic Gurchenko vehicles, *Station for Two* and *Mechanic Gavrilov's Beloved Woman*, and, teetering on the edge of hysteria, Mikhalkov's *Kinfolk* (the ultimate in family disintegration).

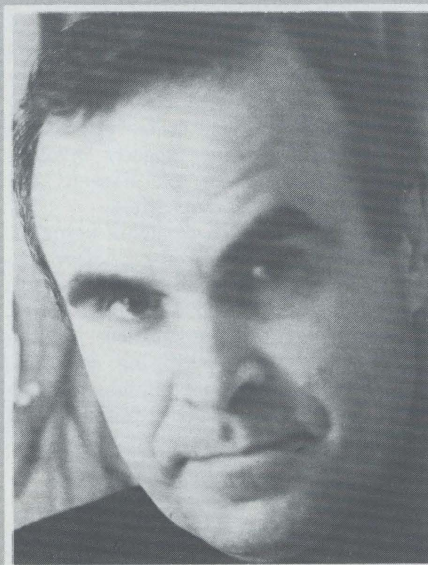
A second current is comparable to the Polish 'cinema of moral unrest' and deals more soberly with issues of personal conscience and social/moral dislocation. Abdrashitov's films are by far the most effective of these; but Balayan's recent *Flights in Dreams and Reality* (which I saw at a packed public show) has become an important focus of discussion, since it deals obliquely with the crisis that has affected many people entering their forties as youthful hopes born of the 'thaw' evaporate. Other examples are Soloviev's *Lifeguard* and, from the Gorky Studio's vein of problem picture, Arsenov's *Don't Part with Those You Love*.

Thirdly, there is the cinematic equivalent of the 'village writers' turning away

standpoint, this was a difficult script, because it offered very little scope for cinematic effect. Just dialogue, dialogue all the time—in fact our working title was *Dialogues*. The problem was how to make the audience concentrate on the dialogues, which meant taking great care to shape the sequence and form of each exchange. It's still a very ascetic film and probably very close to the limit beyond which you have no involvement, or no audience!

For foreigners, I suggested, the value of Abdrashitov's films is that they show with unique precision and intimacy the moral framework of Soviet life: the action of the film disturbs the status quo and throws it into relief. Had Zanussi been mentioned as a comparison? 'Yes, but this may sound immodest, I think that what you call the framework is drawn more sharply in our films.' And who do Abdrashitov and Mindadze have in mind as their audience? 'Obviously our films are for an educated audience, who reflect on things, but beyond this we don't know. However, we are becoming very good at predicting accurately how large the actual attendances will be. Our first film, *Witness for the Defence*, was seen by a large number, twenty-five million; *The Turning* and *Foxhunting* both reached about nine million; and now *The Train Has Stopped*, which is still in the cinemas, looks like reaching our largest audience so far.' □

Gleb Panfilov



At 48, Gleb Panfilov is of the same generation as Tarkovsky, yet although his name would figure on any list of exceptional Soviet film-makers that emerged in the 60s, he has become one of the least known. Like Klimov and Ioseliani, his career has been blighted by a notorious 'arrested' film, *Tema*. 'It's only now, some years after, that I can explain the matter simply to myself. *Tema* didn't make its way on to the screens: the first

reactions were negative and only an exceptional few defended it. Let us say, it was a little advanced for its time and there is a saying: a truth not spoken in its proper time is an unwelcome truth. Some of my colleagues saw the film as untactful. But I believe it was an honest, topical and good film. Time will tell.

'The basic facts are that it was finished in April 1980 and shown during the Moscow Festival on 14 July 1981, here in the White Hall of Dom Kino, which seats 700. Then it was shown several times at a city cinema in Tallin, during an All-Union Festival, and it was encouraging that all these screenings were full, which shows that people know about the film and want to see it. It was also shown at the House of Cinema in Leningrad while I was working there and that's all, so far.' Did he still hope it would be released? 'Another saying: youth is raised on hope, I'm no longer young, but I still have hope.'

I reported the surprise and disappointment of some who managed to see his next film, *Valentina*, at Cannes in 1981. Both the subject, a light-hearted village love story, and the form, closely following the play by Vampilov on which it was based, had disconcerted critics expecting sterner stuff. This led to a discussion of Panfilov's researches into a 'theatrical' notion of filmic form, which had started from the observation that *Tema* seemed 'theatrical'. *Valentina* is set almost



Street hoarding for *Station for Two*.

from city life and Western values, in favour of a return to Russian and other ethnic roots. The most serious example is Klimov's *Farewell*, which is his majestic and deeply felt realisation of the project that his wife, Larissa Shepitko, was planning at the time of her death, based on Valentin Rasputin's novel *Farewell to Matyora*. *Vasily and Vasilisa*, also based on a Rasputin story, is both a celebration of village life and a candid record of misery and hardship. While this return to the land may have some regressive features from both Soviet and Western

standpoints, it is rarely utopian or bucolic, but more often based on a fatalistic realism following a philosophical rejection of Western 'progress'.

There is also, of course, the cinema of 'mass production', as Panfilov termed it, which continues untroubled by such self-examination: clumsy adventure films, provincial folklorism, leaden literary adaptations and heartwarming tales from the war are still in plentiful supply. Only Georgia, of all the republics, seems to have maintained its distinctive output and at least two Georgian films that I

saw, *The Swimmer* and *The Way Home*, are formally unlike anything else—to the point of total unintelligibility in the latter case! Paradzhanov, interestingly, is now out of prison and working on a new film in Georgia, *The Fortress of Surami*.

But the degree of relative autonomy within such a centralised and bureaucratic system is still remarkable. The state may be the sole producer, distributor and exhibitor, yet as many anomalous, often downright perverse films get made and shown, in some fashion, as in any supposedly pluralist system. *Tema* may be an 'arrested' film for the present, as *Pastorale* and *Agonia* were until recently, as *A Severe Young Man* was in the 30s and *A Nail in the Boot* may be for ever; yet this is the logical consequence of a concern with the social and political function of cinema that is challenging to say the least. While our newspapers urge the City to cash in on the current British cinema bonanza, *Pravda* solemnly informs its readers that *Private Life*, *Station for Two* and *Kinfolk* are proof that 'Soviet society is not indifferent to its social and moral problems' and that film-makers may act as physicians to the body politic. ■

Special thanks to Natalya Soboleva, Inna Kisseleva and Tatiana Yeliseyeva for help with screenings, visits and interviews; and to the Director and staff of the Institute for the History of Cinema Art, and the External Relations Department of Goskino for their hospitality.

Photographs: Richard Taylor, Ian Christie.

entirely in the open centre of a small Siberian village and for Panfilov it was an ideal opportunity to avoid the normal use of close-ups for selective emphasis and to experiment with multiple foci of interest within the frame. He feels that these experiments have had some visible influence on his colleagues, to his satisfaction.

They have also born fruit in his new and very handsome film, *Vassa*, after the 1910 play by Gorky, *Vassa Zheleznova*. 'The audience here knows this play all too well and their experience of it is intensely conservative, so the challenge was not just to make a new film but to carry the audience with me against their prejudices. Worse still, there is a famous 1953 film of the play, which was shown on television no less than four times

while I was preparing my film! But I was convinced there was room for a new interpretation that went back to what Gorky really intended; and the first thing I discovered was that Vassa should actually be a young woman. Usually she's played by an actress of 70, with her daughters in their late 30s, but Gorky actually says that she is forty-two and looks younger, so the tragedy involves her young daughters of sixteen and seventeen being left motherless.

'I also realised that, far from being an "iron lady" (her surname, *Zheleznova*, derives from the Russian word for iron), she was very human and a kind mother; even though her circumstances, as the head of the family shipping business, forced her to do cruel things. This is really a film about the potential of

women and their problems in coping with dreadful pressures. Her power is "soft" rather than hard and she is in fact a deeply Russian character.

'I wanted to use the play to explore the transforming power of the great economic advance that occurred in Russia at the time it's set: this wasn't the stagnant era of Ostrovsky, it was the time of Savva Morozov, who was one of the most learned men of his time, and of Schuchin, who built the Trans-Siberian Railway and collected the pictures which became the Pushkin Museum collection. The *art nouveau* decor of Vassa's mansion also ran directly counter to the stage tradition of the play. Normally the house is shown as primitive and gloomy, but Vassa belongs to the third generation of a rich merchant family; she knows how to spend money effectively.'

Vassa seems certain to restore Panfilov to the forefront of attention and also perhaps to lead to a reconsideration of *Valentina*. As for future plans, experience has taught him to have alternative projects. One is to continue with Gorky and make a new version of *Mother*, following in the classic footsteps of Pudovkin and Donskoi. Another project is a Stefan Zweig adaptation and he still cherishes hopes of a film *entirely* about Joan of Arc, after the film-within-a-film scenes in his second feature, *The Beginning* (1970). For Gleb Panfilov, 1983 seems, cautiously, like a new beginning. ■



Vassa: What Gorky intended.

Band of Brothers

In November 1982, the Directors' Guild of Great Britain was launched. During February, it was already coming under fire from the film and TV workers' union, the ACTT. By late spring, after an exuberant weekend meeting at Ronnie Scott's jazz club in London, it boasted over 200 members, including such luminaries as Lindsay Anderson, Michael Apted, John Boorman, Bryan Forbes, Jack Gold, Hugh Hudson, Richard Loncraine, Alan Parker, Nicolas Roeg, John Schlesinger and Fred Zinnemann. In the same month, the ACTT signed agreements of friendship and co-operation with the American and Canadian directors' guilds, apparently nipping the activities of the new British guild firmly in the bud.

The Guild sees it rather differently, with chairman Piers Haggard claiming for it a unique informing principle. 'Our proposition is that all directors—TV, radio, cable, opera, theatre, cinema—have something very important in common.' Nicolas Roeg refers to the 'absolute solidarity of directors'. And the list of members seems to bear out much of the claim. Respected theatre directors such as Trevor Nunn, Michael Bogdanov, Bill Bryden and Sir Peter Hall rub shoulders with newcomers like Phil Young. A large contingent from television includes Les Blair, Alan Gibson and Ian Sturtard. The roll call of those from the commercials world includes Berny Stringle, Terry Bedford and Bob Brooks (the director of *Tattoo* as well as some of the best-loved Benson and Hedges fantasies).

But what do they do? 'They're an irrelevancy,' says ACTT chief Alan Sapper, and points out that his union will continue to negotiate on everything from pensions to co-productions for all filmmakers, including directors. Because of the large proportion of film and TV members, two-thirds of the Guild's members belong to the ACTT, and the union would certainly take action against any who tried to usurp its practical authority. On the face of it, the Guild's riposte is almost endearingly feeble: it exists to campaign against censorship and for the principle of director's copyright. It plans to publish a directory of British directors—as a work of reference and in order to stimulate international demand for its members' work. It will set up a body to pursue the residuals and royalties due to members. And it will organise workshops in which directors from different media can discuss and experiment with their craft. So far, for example, the Guild's members have faced one censorship showdown, over cuts requested by film censor James Ferman in Michael Winner's *The Wicked Lady*. As it happens, Winner won and the censor lost, but to an even mildly cynical eye it's a hollow victory. *The Wicked Lady* was



'The Ploughman's Lunch'. At the Tory conference; Jonathan Pryce, left.

not the first time (and doubtless won't be the last) that the director of *Death Wish II* has used a tussle with the censor's office to generate a little free publicity.

But if scepticism is in order, cynicism is not. The Guild is pursuing a commendably open policy on admissions—anyone with a single professional production to his credit is eligible. The new organisation is setting its sights very much on the future, and in particular on the introduction of cable TV. 'We are totally committed,' says Bill Bryden, theatre and now film director, 'to preparing ourselves for the moment in two or three years time when the theatre director and the on-the-street director will be piping their work directly into audiences' homes. The theatre director in that sense is a crucial part of our mandate.' The Guild foresees a generally optimistic future in which TV, theatre and cinema will all gradually become adjoining windows in a single entertainment edifice.

Cable has already revolutionised the financial shape of the American film and TV business—more, perhaps, than most of us acknowledge, except for the sales arms of companies such as Goldcrest and Thorn-EMI, who are intimately interested. The ACTT has taken a stand against cabling in Britain, and demanded a high quota of British-originated programming as the price for its co-operation in cable development. But events seem to be outstripping them. Already, there's a very visible crossover between media: Goldcrest's 'First Love' series for Channel 4 is being sold for theatrical (cinema) release in some territories, as is Central's *Walter* trilogy, directed by Stephen Frears. Richard Eyre has directed *The Ploughman's Lunch* for cinema and Channel 4 release, having last year given us the award-

winning *Guys and Dolls* at the National Theatre. And Goldcrest again are producing two quite different versions of the M. M. Kaye novel *The Far Pavilions*, one as a TV and cable mini-series, the other as a feature film.

What's more doubtful is whether British cable as such will inject new life into the British entertainment industry—it may just mean more re-runs of recent American movies, more *Match of the Day* and more darts. 'Soon you'll be wearing lapel cameras and shooting this interview as we speak,' says Nic Roeg, rather optimistically. But there are moments when the fresh face of the Guild discloses sourer motives on the part of members who see it as an alternative to the trade union with which they've struggled, or had to compromise, over the years. One figure noticeably absent from the membership list is Bill Forsyth, who comments simply and drily, 'One union is good enough for me. So I wouldn't join the Guild.' In any case, he adds, 'Directors aren't people who should associate with each other. They should be fighting and struggling on their own. Creatively I don't see much point in it.'

Pressure Groups

The suggestion that Iain Sproat, then minister responsible for the film industry, might intend to abolish the Eady Levy and close down the National Film Finance Corporation was leaked towards the end of last year and has sparked off more anxiety about the future of British cinema and television. The British Film and TV Producers' Association (BFTPA), the contractual body which represents

DOUBLE TAKES

production interests, has called for more government investment in the industry; continued support for the NFFC and the National Film and Television School (both of which are Eady-funded); and a fiscal system which would actively encourage the TV companies to take part in feature production (by making the cost allowable against their levy).

The Association of Independent Producers, in which both David Puttnam and Alan Parker have been very active, has taken the lobby a stage further: they are demanding a levy on blank video-cassettes; a levy on films shown on TV, related to the number of viewers; and a closed-cycle system, whereby money from the revamped Eady Levy system (drawing on tapes, TV and cinema) would be paid back to producers not as cash but in the form of credits tied to future British production. According to their calculations, an extended and reorganised levy would raise some £35m a year, of which one-third would go back to producers as box-office reward and two-thirds would be administered to sustain cinemas, the NFFC and the Film and Television School.

But in spirit at least the new Directors' Guild takes the process one dramatic stage further: they endorse most of the AIP recommendations, particularly over the need to restore a balance between film and television. But for the Guild the extension of Eady and re-creation of the NFFC (partly along the lines of the British Film Authority which was proposed during the last Labour administration) would be far more extensive. The new body, whatever it was called, would operate with the same degree of autonomy and executive authority as the Australian Film Commission (whereas the BFTPA plan proposes it receive no more than 25 per cent of Eady). And it would not reward individual producers according to box-office performance of their films. 'We are independent,' explains Alan Parker, 'and the only shame is that the voice of independence in British cinema has so far been dominated by the theoreticians, the critics and the bureaucrats.' That observation chimes with the Guild's declared intention to 'get a voice for directors', and with Nic Roeg's more gently phrased wish to 're-create the best aspects of salon society, in which you are constantly meeting and discussing these issues with your peers.'

In Britain artists have always been extraordinarily shy of forming salons, or schools, or interest groups—presumably as a legacy of the Romantic literary tradition. The paradox is that the rest of English society has remained intensely clannish. Now the creation of the Directors' Guild suggests a way in which the barriers of caste and class which divide our performing arts might at last begin to be broken down (so that, for example, Alan Parker might no longer have to declare himself an entertainer while hankering after the status of Artist).



'The Wicked Lady': Faye Dunaway with aged retainer John Gielgud.

Recently, with this handful of pressure groups fighting for influence over government thinking, it may have seemed that the celluloid equivalents of the Athenaeum, the Travellers' and the Garrick had all gone to war on each other. But the proposition that the directors are genuinely independent, because they have no immediate vested financial interest in the outcome, is true and should be heard. And the demand that the artists should have a say in the future of their art is not, after all, so absurd...

Cannonades

When the current cycle of production has become a subject for doctoral theses in ten years' time, the output of Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus—Cannon Films—should be a fascinating area for exploration. For the two producers, who rose to international prominence on the success of their *Lemon Popsicle* sex comedy series, have left an unmistakable stamp on all their films. There is a kind of crude bluntness which somehow spreads from project to project. In *Nana*, despite the nudity, the peepholes and the period lechery, what emerges most is an unfeigned boredom; in *Treasure of the Four Crowns*, Cannon's 3D 'high adventure' project, Tony Anthony runs through an obstacle course of raining boulders and whistling spears as if he were crossing his kitchen; and *That Championship Season*, despite the assembled talents of Martin Sheen, Paul Sorvino and Robert Mitchum, feels like a weekend project, as if the actors, crew and director had stumbled on to the same set and decided that they might as well make a movie while they were there.

It will be curious to see how *Bolero* and *Sahara* emerge—the former because John and Bo Derek are very much their own masters, and the latter because, after a change of director and some difficulties with Brooke Shields' strong-minded mother, Menahem Golan apparently had to step in and take over the reins of direction himself. But the most bizarre

product of the Cannon method so far has been *The Wicked Lady*. Most of it is straight Michael Winner, from the lurid violence (two women fighting with whips; Faye Dunaway bleeding profusely from a bullet wound in the breast) to the campy humour (a buxom serving wench, for example, returns to query a lunch order: 'Did you order three pheasant? Or was it one pheasant, one grouse and one lamb chop?'). But, inexplicably, there are moments when the action reverts to lumpy seriousness, and the camera for no reason tracks forward to fill the screen with an absurdly emphatic close-up of a woman's breast or a corridor fills up with naked serving girls. Of course these moments are staples in the titillation stakes for which *Nana* is playing. But in a film starring Faye Dunaway, Sir John Gielgud and Denholm Elliott they look genuinely bizarre—as if some rather lazy editor at a central Cannon editing console had decided to throw a bit of Popsicle into every film that came his way.

Promomen

'I don't think anything extraordinary is happening in the British film industry—it's on the brink of collapse, as it has always been. But because of the growing number of areas in which you can train, there are many more young directors hustling a deal now, and so there are more pictures being made. Whether you call them cinema films, I don't know...' (Jeremy Thomas, producer of *The Shout*, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, *Eureka*).

Given a National Film and Television School whose finances have always been uncertain, and television companies who never considered themselves producers of films, it's not surprising that the successful British advertising industry should have been treated as a seed-bed for new talent. Terry Bedford, one-time lighting photographer for Ridley Scott, and now directing his first feature (*Slayground*) for Thorn-EMI, describes it as a 'training ground where you can try everything—complicated opticals, cranes, all the toys. You might be retired at the BBC before you had access to those kinds of resources.'

Within advertising films, the pop-promo has become a distinct species on its own, a form in which a handful of young directors have shone. And with increasing attention to that area, the annual 'Best of British Promos' event hosted by *Music and Video Week* magazine has become something of a mini-Academy event. The panel of judges this year, for example, included Alan Parker, Sandy Lieberman (production executive at the Ladd Company) and Channel 4's music editor Andy Park. But the short films themselves, despite the promise of fresh images, told a depressing story.

Because they only run for three or four minutes, the key to success lies in a single prop (a particular car, a building, a rollercoaster ride); a single visual theme (back-lighting, sepia, a primary colour); or, at their simplest, a song and a performer strong enough merely to be recorded doing their thing.

But the disappointment in this year's selection arose because of the derivative choices being made even *within* those strict limits. Many of them plundered movie history for inspiration—from *A Hard Day's Night* and *East of Eden* to *Dr No* and *From Here to Eternity*. Even the Australian Russell Mulcahy (now developing a film with David Puttnam), the leading young tyro among promo film-makers, seemed happy just to pan his camera across an elaborately decorated set, supplying a little, wistful element of 'story' to flesh out Fleetwood Mac's 'Gypsy'. Dave Robinson, who directed them in the feature *Take It or Leave It* two years ago, by contrast picked simple but effective props within which to set the cheerfully irreverent *Madness*—a Morris Minor for 'Driving in My Car', a rollercoaster ride for 'House of Fun'. Other shorts used elaborate optical wipes, split-screens or constant camera movement. But the only real surprise was Julien Temple's film for The Kinks' 'Come Dancing', which opens with perfectly coiffed couples fox-trotting down the aisles of a supermarket (though Temple has already directed *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*; was to have directed the elaborate illusionist movie *Mandrake the Magician* for Goldcrest; and is now developing a film from Colin MacInnes' story of 50s teenage, *Absolute Beginners*). But for all the smoke and neon, the fast cutting and careful production values, the Twenty Best Promos show did not suggest anything new—only old pictures in fancy frames.

The effect is depressing simply because the first wave of advertising directors, including Ridley Scott and Alan Parker, has already arrived in feature film and it would be good to anticipate further progress. But if anything, the machinery which has favoured the technical and design skills of British commercials' directors may now start to go into reverse. Adrian Lyne (who is a partner in the advertising company Jennie and Co, with Terry Bedford) now has his second Hollywood production in release (the first, *Foxes*, was a David Puttnam project). Entitled *Flashdance*, it's a film which seems to have been made almost without a script—in outline the story of an attractive young woman, working as a welder on a construction site, who dreams of becoming a ballerina and performs in a local bar in the evenings. Carried along by its almost continuous musical track, the movie is in fact nothing more than a series of dance montage sequences, shot in loving close-up but unable to open out any kind of articulate emotional perspective. The effect is numbing.



'Flashdance': Jennifer Beale at the Pittsburgh Conservatory of Dance.

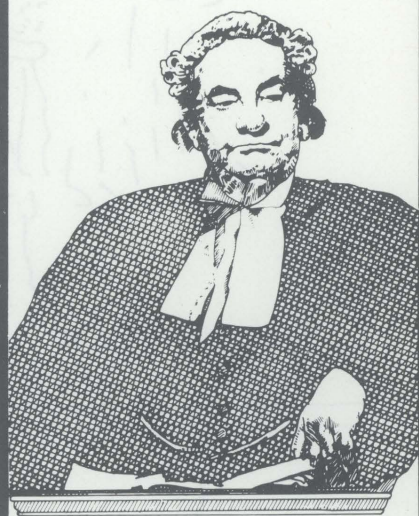
At the opposite end of the scale, Tony (brother of Ridley) Scott has made a film so persistently evocative of mood that the effect is cloying. *The Hunger* stars Catherine Deneuve as an ageless vampire queen, now living in baronial splendour in a New York town house with her consort (David Bowie). The perfection of their world—filled with classical music, shimmering lace and visible grace—is destroyed when age catches up with Bowie and kills him, leaving Deneuve to find another partner to ease her path through immortality. With its immaculate clothes and production design (and a chic opening sequence which features the group Bauhaus), *Hunger* might be one of the more languid pop-promos (a Bauhaus promo, even) extended to over an hour and a half. But it leaves you wondering whether it is, in any effective sense, a *cinema film*. Alan Parker has escaped this fate, simply by turning his eye to such a mixed bag of projects. But his contemporaries seem to be advancing at a disturbing rate into expressionism—without having anything very noticeable to express.

ALMEREIDA



Promo style.

Justice seen to be done



Rumpole's back and Mobil's got him.

Thanks to a pre-production agreement with Mobil, that shabby curmudgeon of the Old Bailey will soon be returning to American television screens for a long-awaited third series.

But what about Rumpole addicts who live somewhat closer to Temple Bar?

They'll benefit too. Because it was Mobil's involvement at an early stage that has made this new series a certainty. And now production is underway, with transmission on British screens likely in the autumn.

Called back to the bar for all six one-hour episodes will be Leo McKern as Rumpole, joined by Peggy Thorpe-Bates as She Who Must be Obeyed.

Scripts, as usual, are by John Mortimer, the man to whom Rumpole owes all.

Mobil®

PARKER'S PEN

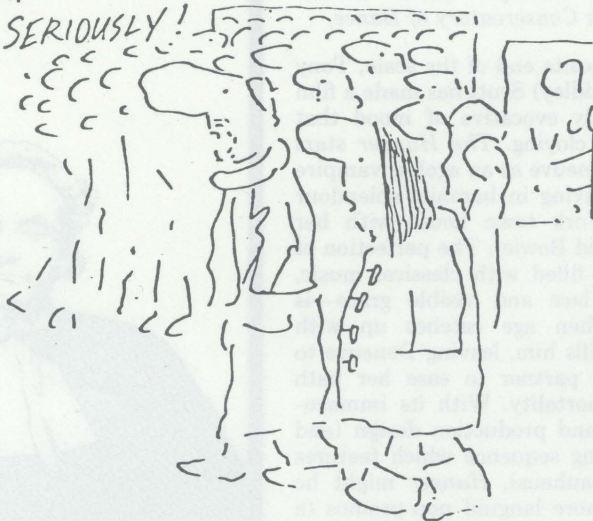
I MEAN NOBODY WAS IN JAIL
WHILE DIRECTING IT.

NOBODY GOT MAL RIA IN A SOUTH AMERICAN
JUNGLE TO MAKE IT.

NOBODY COMMITTED SUICIDE IN THE MIDDLE OF
PRODUCTION.

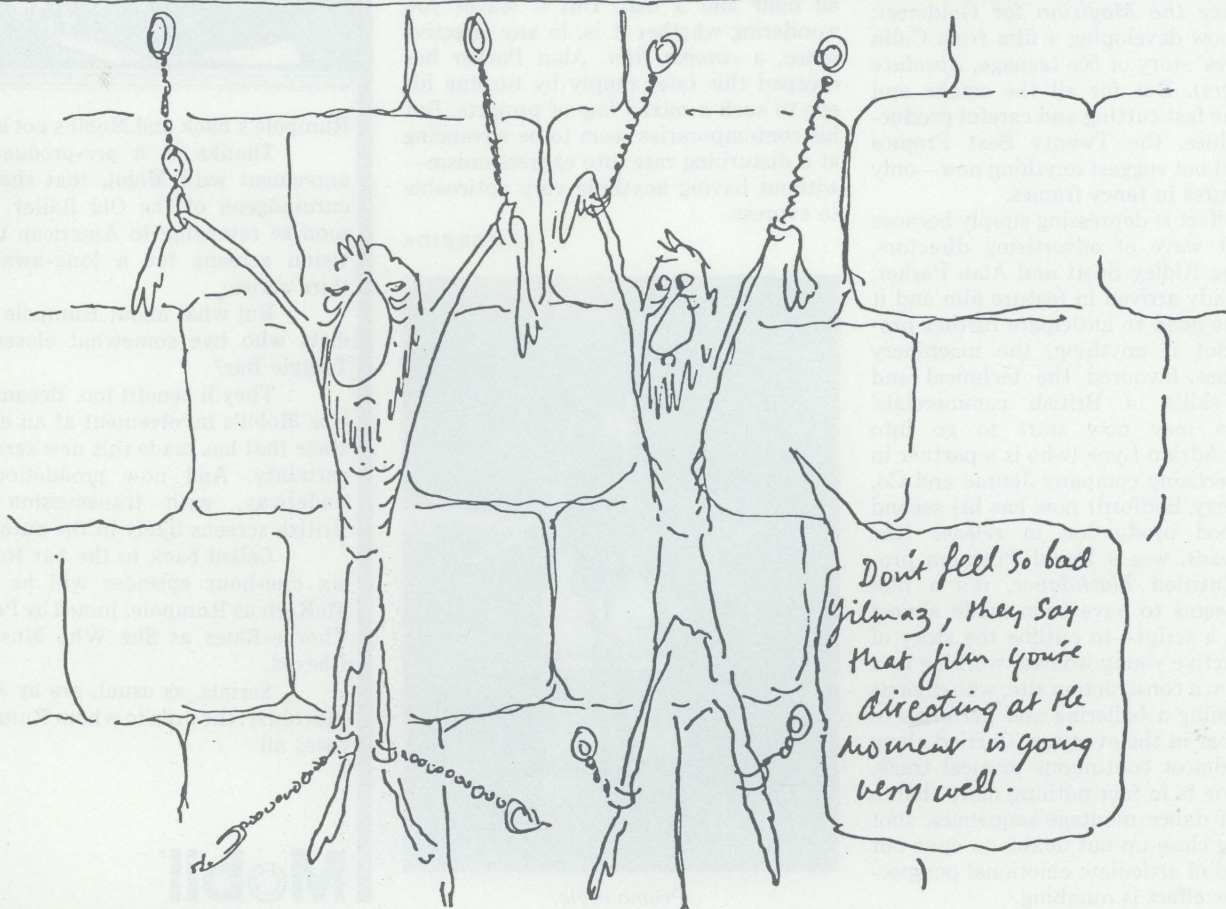
NOBODY WAS HARRASSED BY FRANCIS COPPOLA
DURING FILMING.

I MEAN... HOW DO THEY EXPECT US TO TAKE
THIS FILM SERIOUSLY!



IN NEW
PSEUDOSCOPE

That's the
new system where
they keep the film
in the can and release
the Sight & Sound review...



Don't feel so bad
Yilmaz, they say
that film you're
directing at the
moment is going
very well.

THE FILM CRITIC, FROM THE DIRECTOR'S POINT OF VIEW.



I can only describe it as trying to run a four minute mile with an alcoholic poodle snapping at your ankles and with the ever present fear that David Robinson and Alexander Walker will jump on you in the showers...

I'm surprised 'The Draughtsman's Contract' didn't win something - Best Costume Design at least - for the Emperor's new clothes...



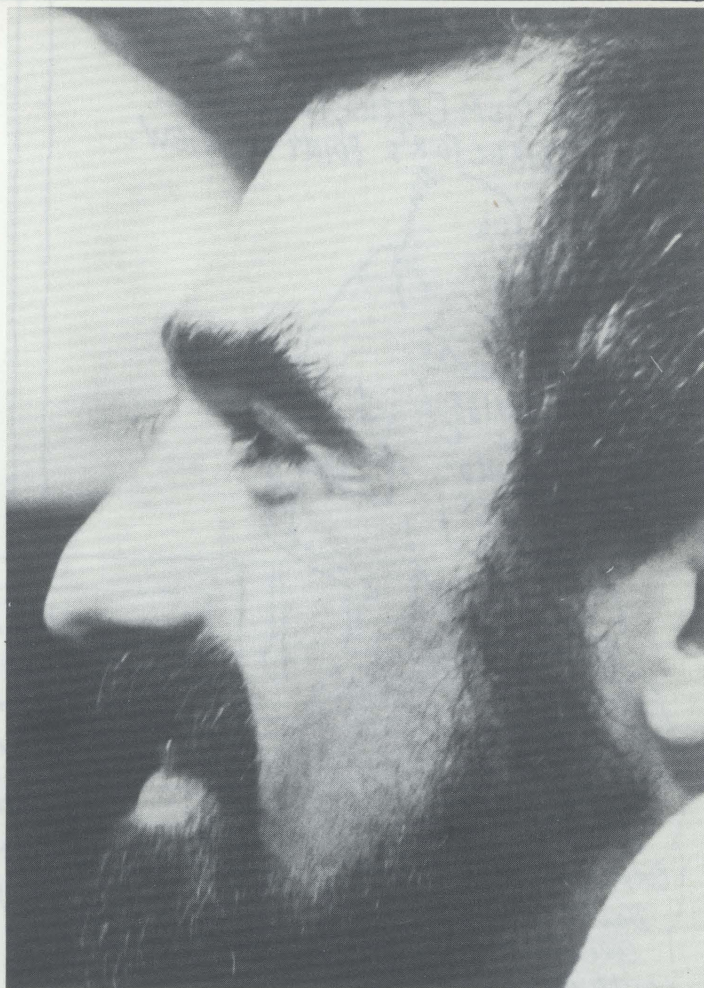
My heart tells me the negative was smuggled out of some distant oppressed country under the noses of a vicious totalitarian regime, but the numbness in my backside tells me I would be better off at home watching Sportsnight...



Quite frankly your script stinks, the director suggested is a pretentious incompetent, it's got about as much audience appeal as herpes in the pop com in fact it's a mystery to me why you couldn't get a Channel 4 - BFI production deal..

Martin Scorsese's STILL LIFE

Terrence Rafferty



Martin Scorsese has stopped moving. The whirling, volatile camera of *Mean Streets*, *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, *Taxi Driver* has been slowing down gradually over the years, steadying itself, settling into the fixed position it finally assumes in *The King of Comedy*: an almost classical *mise en scène*, cut to the stately, regular editing rhythms of the traditional American narrative film. *The King of Comedy* isn't a dull movie: the story of an aggressive aspiring comedian named Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) who besieges talk show host Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis) in the hope of landing a spot on his show, it has—like *Taxi Driver*—a built-in, grotesque fascination, and Scorsese's newly stripped-down style serves it well. But it's a static situation. Scorsese explains his conception of the film this way: 'I can make each shot moving, but I didn't find any reason for it. Everybody in this movie is impassible, they're like rocks: Lewis is here, he ain't going to budge; Rupert is here, he's not going to; Shelley Hack [who plays Jerry Langford's assistant] is here ... Everybody's so rigid that just a medium shot of them talking to each other would do.' This fixed quality isn't new in Scorsese's work, but in the past it has been his characters' final state—the earlier films' furious movement often culminated in stasis, immobility, even death. In the new film, the characters are dead right from the start. *The King of Comedy* is a

message from beyond the grave of ambition, from the afterlife of achieved success.

Scorsese describes the new film as a 'reassessment'. 'It's like looking back on the years before. Jerry Langford is what I am now, to a certain extent. The film is a kind of bridge—to where, I don't know. It's like starting all over.' Though *The King of Comedy* doesn't feel as passionate and personal as Scorsese's description—it seems more an epilogue than a climax—the film does recapitulate the themes of the director's post-*Taxi Driver* work: the establishment of identity in public and the ambiguous relationship of self to performance.

The real climax of the story that Scorsese has been telling in his recent work is the complex, unnerving final scene of *Raging Bull*, in which the retired Jake La Motta, encased now in evening clothes and his own massive flesh, sits before a mirror in his dressing room rehearsing a speech for his one-man stage show. The reading is Brando's famous taxicab scene from *On the Waterfront*, the eloquent monologue in which Terry Malloy accuses his brother of ruining his career by encouraging him to throw a fight. It's a scene that La Motta has lived through—he, too, has taken a dive, sacrificed his pride at the instigation of his pragmatic brother—but there's no conviction in his reading. La Motta is an entertainer now, a glossy abstraction of

his former self, his fighter's body gone to comfortable flab, a cushion against the pain and punishment that have defined his life. His flat reading tells us that he's not feeling the pain any more, but is simply alluding to it, *using* it because it's what the audience expects, it's how they recognise a 'Jake La Motta' who's nearly unrecognisable otherwise.

Scorsese refers to this as the 'redemption scene' in *Raging Bull*. 'We should all have such peace,' he says, and it's true that there's a resignation in La Motta that contrasts sharply with the uneasy, combative persona of the younger man (and that contrasts, too, with his transitional stage as night club owner and comedian, making hostile, unfunny jokes based on his own sexual paranoia and his contempt for the audience). But the toneless reading, the distance from reality (De Niro as La Motta as Brando as Terry Malloy, reading a movie-script version of one of the most painful experiences in the fighter's life), and the vacancy of La Motta's slitted eyes, nearly invisible in the fleshy mask of his face—all make this, at best, an ambiguous redemption. La Motta hasn't died and gone to heaven; he's died and gone on stage.

The chill in the last scene of *Raging Bull* pervades *The King of Comedy*. The film confines itself to a stifling, hermetic show-biz world: there isn't a scene in the film that is not related to celebrity and its pursuit. It begins with television—the

introduction to Jerry Langford's late-night talk show; a caricature of Jerry against a hideous purple curtain, an oozing voiceover announcing his entrance before the 'live' star walks on—and ends with television, as a stiff, glassy-eyed Rupert Pupkin is introduced as the star of his own show. These scenes are like quotation marks, distancing with irony everything in between them: the 'real life' action of the film can't shake off the insidious, glossy inauthenticity of the images that frame it.

The basement where Rupert spends his time when he's at home is done up in the bright, anonymous decor of a talk show set, and he hosts his own 'show' there every morning before work, trading show-biz banter with life-size cardboard cutouts of Liza Minnelli and Jerry Langford, kissing their flat, grinning faces when he's 'gotta run'. Except for brief bursts of anger at his mother (unseen but very clearly heard) and at the crazed fan Masha who helps him kidnap Jerry, Rupert never slips out of the TV smoothie persona he's created for himself: his loud clothes (he wears a red, white and blue outfit through the first half of the picture) and hard, manufactured-looking hairdo and moustache are like armour protecting him from the difficulty of the world, from reality itself—the kind of armour that the fat, tuxedoed La Motta has acquired by the final scene of *Raging Bull*, after years of standing almost naked in the boxing ring, absorbing punishment.

This anaesthetised quality isn't unique to Rupert. It's shared by all the characters in *The King of Comedy*, including Jerry Langford, the character Scorsese claims is what he is now. Langford seems to have no human relationships; he has only fans and employees. Instead of friends, he has the 'guests' at his endless talk-show party—human intimacy only

marginally less illusory than Rupert's cardboard fantasies in his basement. Langford is as isolated in his celebrity as Rupert is in his illusions of celebrity: the most basic kinds of human communication are missing from their lives, or distorted into parody. When someone knits a sweater for Jerry, it's not a wife or a girlfriend or a mother, it's crazy Masha; when Rupert shows Jerry a picture of his 'pride and joy', it turns out to be a dumb joke, a wallet-size picture of the furniture polish Pride and the dishwashing liquid Joy. And every stage of Rupert's courtship of Rita, the girl he had a crush on in high school, is mediated by his show-biz obsessions: on their first date, he shows her his collection of celebrity autographs; their second date is a trip to Langford's country home, where Rupert thinks he has been invited for the weekend; their last meeting, in the bar where Rita works, consists of watching Rupert's monologue on the bar TV. Langford's Manhattan apartment is as elegantly desolate as his talk show set or his corporate offices where Rupert waits to see him. For company, as Langford sits down to dinner, he has a TV set (showing *Pickup on South Street* with the sound off); when he answers the phone, it's Masha.

Scorsese calls attention to the absences, the vacancy of these lives through the absence of his characteristically extravagant visual and narrative techniques. It's a far cry from the teeming, anecdotal narrative of *Mean Streets*, the camera that wouldn't stay still, framing and reframing the action as if it couldn't see enough. In *The King of Comedy*, Scorsese operates from a minimalist aesthetic, taking more and more away until only the barest plot, the most functional and abstract compositions are left. 'I kept saying to myself, "Maybe I should move the camera. People are going to say I didn't direct this because

the camera's not moving." And then I said, "Don't be a schmuck, the director doesn't have to be a person who moves the camera." You have to know when *not* to move the camera. I wanted the material and the characters to carry the depth of the story—the size of the frame, too. The camera moves with people, either tracks or pans, but that's about it. I wanted the characters to hold the frame.' And just as camera movement is reduced to a minimum, so is narrative information. Scorsese admits, 'I had trouble with the film because it was a straight story line. I had difficulty directing certain key story images to help the story along, and sure enough a lot of them were cut out of the picture ... At times I couldn't understand why I had to take a shot of a guy walking through a doorway to explain that he was in there. Certain connective shots bother me, they bother me.'

So he keeps reducing, abstracting, eliminating even crucial information, like what kind of performer Jerry Langford is: 'I shot a [Jerry Langford] monologue, but I took it out. If you show him performing, if you show any real comedy in the picture, you're testing what's funny to me and what's funny to you. I mean, I may find a Jerry Lewis monologue funny and the film audience may not, and that may take away from the validity of the main character, Rupert Pupkin, who idolises this guy's comedy. The audience may say "What do you want to be like him for? We don't like his jokes." So I thought I'd take any chance of that away.' So it 'doesn't matter, not at all', whether Jerry Langford's funny or not—all that's left, then, is that he's 'Jerry Langford', a star, a fully achieved, self-contained rocklike identity. That's paring it down pretty far.

Scorsese's techniques in *The King of Comedy* produce a world in which everything and everyone is hard, inscrutable, opaque. There's nothing for the camera to search out, nothing more to tell us about the characters or the culture they live in, nothing that matters beyond the placement of objects and bodies in the fixed frame. The most memorable image in the film is of Lewis taped from head to toe, immobile and silent, like a mummy, in Masha's creepy, candlelit, opulent town house. Masha circles around him, caressing, crazy, seductive, taking him in from every angle, as the flickering light shows us new, unexpected contours of their faces and bodies. Scorsese's films have always been fascinated by stasis, but he has always hovered around his characters, exploring, playing with them as Masha does, predatory, voracious. But there's no appetite in *The King of Comedy*. If Jerry Langford is Scorsese's metaphor for his current self, then this film's metaphor for itself might be Jerry's solitary dinner in his Manhattan apartment: he eats without much interest, picking at his food, in a barren, featureless, too bright room, in medium shot, the only flicker of interest in the background an old movie on TV, deprived of sound, image reduced, unwatched, simply there.

Raging Bull: The former boxer Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro).



Some of the old movies in the background of *The King of Comedy* are Hollywood classics—and some are Scorsese's own. Scorsese is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the old Hollywood, almost reverent: describing a meeting with André De Toth, he refers to him throughout as 'Mister De Toth'; he never cites a film without attaching the director's name, in a kind of academic incantation ('*Northwest Passage*, King Vidor... *Public Enemy*, William A. Wellman'). In some sense, *The King of Comedy* is an experiment for Scorsese, an exercise in the classical style of the American directors he loves, like John Ford. 'From Ford, you kind of notice when not to cut. When it's so damn beautiful—what's the sense? What, are you crazy, move the camera? Just leave it there, look how beautiful it is.' Scorsese's work in *The King of Comedy* may be a kind of homage to old masters, but he can't quite disguise his ambivalence: he holds the camera on his minimalist compositions, the rocklike figures set against stark and cheerless decor, but it's not because they're so damn beautiful. This isn't Monument Valley; it's Death Valley.

This may be deliberate, or it may not. Scorsese admits that the style of the Hollywood masters is dead: 'The way we make films these days is totally different, naturally—different set up, different systems, different studio system and everything else. They were making three films a year and they never saw the editor, so they had to shoot the film in such a way that the editor wouldn't use certain cuts.' We can read the dry, academic style of *The King of Comedy* as something self-consciously vestigial, a reminder of a tradition that was once vigorous but has lost its energy—weakened by the death of its masters, the collapse of the system that supported it, and perhaps the whole culture's lack of the shared assumptions necessary to keep a tradition alive. Or perhaps the tradition is a victim of its own success, as Jerry Langford is, turned into something too solid, too perfect, too recognisable to be very expressive any more. The film by itself doesn't quite support this reading: Langford isn't fully articulated as a metaphor for the old tradition—we'd need to see him perform, to have some sense of his place within his own art, not simply his place in the hearts of his uncritical fans. Still, the face of Jerry Langford in *The King of Comedy* is just the sort of portrait of death-by-success in America that has been the focal point of all Scorsese's recent films.

Unlike the director's earlier films, which are concentrated studies of characters in moments of crisis or transition, of identities in the process of definition, the four remarkable films between *Taxi Driver* and *The King of Comedy* have included, or alluded to, such moments without making them the sole focus of the narrative. From *New York, New York*, through the documentaries *The Last Waltz* and *American Boy*, to *Raging Bull*, Scorsese has been working out an idiosyncratic form of film biography

based on narrative ellipsis—a form which assumes a huge gulf between the intense, critical moment when an identity is defined and the long haul of living within the definition. The protagonists of Scorsese's early pictures—J.R. in *Who's That Knocking at My Door?*, Charlie and Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets*, Alice in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, Travis in *Taxi Driver*—have the impulsiveness and volatility of personalities that haven't quite jelled yet: their responses to experience haven't taken on the systematic, predictable quality that comes from a solid sense of one's place in the world. The restless camera, the variable, unsettling editing rhythms of these films are largely a function of their protagonists, characters who can't seem to find a point of rest within the frame.

There's a precise moment when Scorsese's work enters its second phase: it's the controversial denouement of *Taxi Driver*. Having last shown us Travis immobile, apparently dying, amid the carnage he has wrought, Scorsese jumps several months forward, panning across a wall filled with newspaper clippings which proclaim Travis a hero, the saviour of a teenage prostitute. Travis has risen from the dead and been reborn in public, given an identity that we know is purely external, that has nothing to do with his psychotic nature. For the last few minutes of the film, Scorsese lets us take in the effects of Travis' new celebrity: the respectful attitude of his fellow cabbies; the warily friendly, almost chastened behaviour of Betsy, the blonde dream girl who'd spurned him earlier; the quiet, dignified manner that Travis has now assumed. Scorsese's manner in these final scenes is quiet, too, a chilling reserve that allows us plenty of room to consider the gap between the public, heroic Travis and the dangerous sociopath we've been watching for almost two hours, plenty of room to ponder how Travis might attempt to live up to his socially

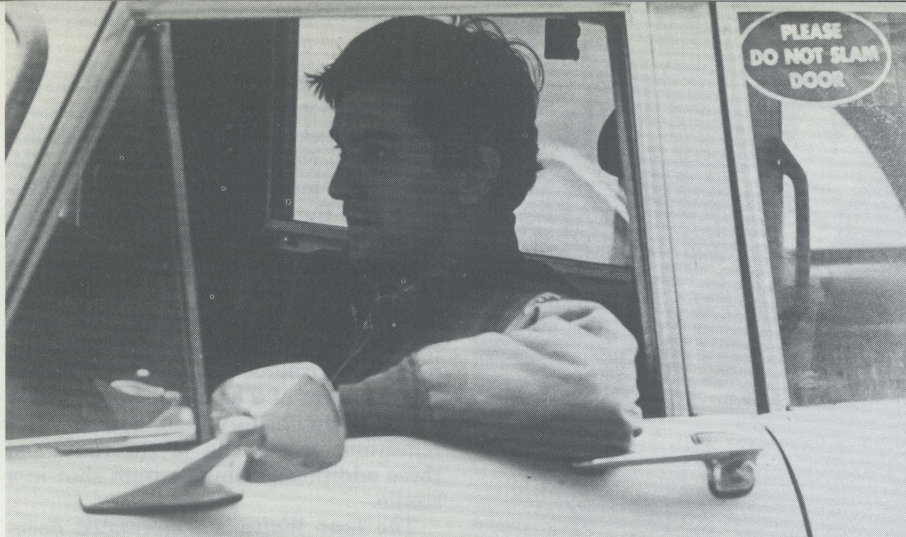
approved identity as avenging angel.

From this point on, from the abrupt freeze-frame of Travis' eyes in the rear-view mirror, the image that snaps shut the tight, internalised world of *Taxi Driver*, the focus of Scorsese's work shifts to the public world, where identities must be sharply defined, where personal conflicts and confusions resolve themselves into a distinctive music, an act—whose success is determined less by the internal demands of the performer than by the external demands of the audience, by how well the act 'plays'. Scorsese's next film, *New York, New York*, not only explores these themes, it embodies them: 'We made up scenes as we went along,' the director says, 'and as our personal lives started to disintegrate also. We'd say, "Hey, let's put this in," and in the meantime, the sets were built and we had to work within the sets.' But for all the passionately personal material being worked out on the screen, the film didn't do well with audiences. 'It's quite ambitious,' Scorsese says, 'but it was never marked for amazing success.' It didn't play.

But *New York, New York* is one of Scorsese's richest films, a work that's almost too dense with ideas. The film intends to be a thorough critique of American values and culture after the Second World War; Scorsese pours into it everything he knows about postwar society, about movies, music, violence, sex, money, ambition—and does it in a mixture of styles and tones that's equally varied, encyclopedic. Of course it doesn't work—Scorsese admits that, at two hours and forty minutes, the picture is a good half-hour too long—but it has the power, the emotional heat that unresolved arguments often have. *New York, New York* is like the intense moment of intellectual excitement when all the implications of a question have suddenly come into view, long before they've been narrowed down to a manageable conclusion.

New York, New York begins on v





The taxi driver (Robert De Niro).

Day in New York, and introduces its characters in the context of a big-band celebration that consciously evokes the 'innocent' style of 40s musicals: a huge studio set with a fake New York visible through the windows; a famous band, Tommy Dorsey's; the celebration used as backdrop for the meeting of the hero and heroine, as if the setting and the music were merely a pretext for the important thing, the love story. The innocent style suits the characters, who seem newly born into this wild, joyful night—they haven't even begun to imagine their lives, the people they'll become.

The tone of this long opening sequence is very cunning: Jimmy Doyle (Robert De Niro), out of uniform, makes a long pass at Francine Evans (Liza Minnelli)—who *is* in uniform—and they play out their meeting scene as just slightly exaggerated versions of the optimistic, energetic boy and girl of the 40s musical. He's brash, aggressive, amusingly persistent; she's reluctant, but with a highly developed skill at snappy putdowns. He's all naked

ambition, she's all armour, and they're perfect images of American values after the war, values that inform every aspect of the characters' lives, that determine both their very different musical styles (Jimmy plays jazz saxophone, Francine's a big-band singer) and the course of their personal relationship. But the sexual antagonism that Scorsese, in the Hollywood tradition, uses for charm and comedy in the opening sequence is progressively stripped of its appeal in the course of the picture until nothing's left but the antagonism, an unbridgeable gap between individuals in a culture that appears seamlessly connected, a perfect success.

Early in the film, Jimmy Doyle explains his priorities to Francine: music, money and love (or sex—he doesn't use either word, just mimes a kiss)—not always in that order, he claims, though we never sense that his hierarchy has changed. His music is his expression of self, his identity, but a more fragile identity than his arrogant manner suggests—his dissonant, slightly abrasive, highly emotional style of playing is borrowed from black music. He's in the vanguard, perhaps, but he's not an innovator, and

in some fundamental way he lacks conviction: although he despises the dominant form of popular music, the big-band sound, he can't stop envying its success. He needs to feel independent *and* he needs to feel recognised; the conflicting demands give a nasty, competitive edge to his personality, and a reckless, almost nihilistic intensity to his playing. Slowly, his art becomes inseparable from his ambition, his need for a public identity.

Recognition comes more easily for Francine Evans. Her performing self, like Jimmy's, is an extension of the personality she shows in her first scenes: cheerful, good-natured, unthreatening. She doesn't stick out in the crowd the way Jimmy does, loudly dressed, moving against the flow of the dancers—she's in uniform, unselfconsciously and unobtrusively, tapping her foot to the music as if its rhythms were precisely hers. Francine turns out to be a perfect big-band singer, a performer in complete harmony with the majority culture. Her music is post-war America's song of itself, a confirmation and a celebration of its identity—a music that's spirited, optimistic, dreamy and clear.

Jimmy Doyle and Francine Evans are made to represent quite a lot about America in the 40s and 50s. And what's most startling about *New York, New York*'s very complicated structure is that they *keep* representing even after their story, on the dramatic level, has ended: they persist as metaphors. The narrative reaches its emotional climax when, in a swift, brutal rush of events, Jimmy and Francine have a terrifying fight in their car, Francine goes into labour, their son is born, and Jimmy leaves her even before she's out of the hospital. There's nothing more to say about them, as characters, after this exhausting sequence; the failure of their relationship couldn't be more final. But *New York, New York* goes on. Jimmy all but disappears, and Francine just *performs*, three big numbers right in a row: the first in a recording studio; the

The King of Comedy:

Masha (Sandra Bernhard) and Pupkin (De Niro); the unwelcome guest; Jerry Lewis, now a Pupkin fantasy.





New York, New York:
Jimmy Doyle (Robert De Niro),
Francine Evans (Liza Minnelli).

second, an elaborate Hollywood production number; the third, a 'live' club performance of 'New York, New York', the official showstopper. This looks like a serious structural flaw, a shockingly obvious one for a director as meticulous as Scorsese; but it's also an index of the complexity of his intentions.

The orgy of performance that closes out *New York, New York* means to tell us a great many things. It wants to say that Francine Evans now exists only as a performer; that public success, in the terms of postwar America, is inevitably an overdetermination of identity, the reduction of self to a performing style, a recognisable product; that any human quality, even energy, can be refined to lifeless self-parody, packaged and sold, like Francine's grotesquely calculated performance of the title song, her body jerking from one exaggerated pose to another, as if electric shocks were running through her every third or fourth beat. It means to say, too, that Jimmy Doyle's aggressive style, the rage he borrowed from the underclass, has begun to find its place in the postwar society, transformed, assimilated into America's optimistic image of itself: the song 'New York, New York' is Jimmy and Francine's collaboration, but it has to be Francine who performs it, who makes it a rousing anthem to the competitive spirit, a love song to success.

What *New York, New York* means to say, finally, is that the reconciliation of

what Jimmy and Francine represent can take place solely on the level of representation, of image, of performance, only after Jimmy and Francine and their tangled personal histories don't exist any more: the song 'New York, New York' is an anthem for postwar America, but it's an elegy for Jimmy and Francine. The film *New York, New York* is an attempt at reconciliation, too, a fusion of diverse movie traditions—film noir, MGM musical, documentary, underground-movie realism—that tells the story of our distance from what those traditions once meant: it's an elegy read over the grave of 50s America.

'It's a whole world changing,' Scorsese says of *New York, New York*. 'It's also a goodbye to a certain kind of film-making. When Jimmy Doyle sees the two people dancing under the El—it's finished.' What the world changed into—the next dance—is the subject of *The Last Waltz*, Scorsese's record of The Band's final concert, in 1976, their 'farewell to the road'. It's an elegy, too: Scorsese jumps forward twenty years from the end of *New York, New York*, to catch the generation of the 60s at its very end, making its own elegy, its retrospective image of itself. *The Last Waltz* is a documentary, but there's nothing accidental about it: the site of the concert, the Winterland hall in San Francisco, was chosen because

it was the site of The Band's first major-league concert in 1969; the guests—Ronnie Hawkins, Muddy Waters, Doctor John, Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, Bob Dylan and more—were selected to illustrate The Band's history and the history of the kind of music they've made; the stage was decorated and lighted to evoke the faded-ballroom ambiance of the 'last waltz' theme; the camera positions were set, and their moves planned, in advance; interviews, conducted by Scorsese, with the members of The Band were shot to fill in their history and record their reflections at the end of the road; and three additional numbers were shot in a studio.

The Last Waltz is a calculated document, as conscious and reflective as *Woodstock* was unconscious and immediate. The Woodstock festival in 1969 was the rock culture's definition of itself at its peak; The Band and many of their guests had been there, and Scorsese was one of the editors of the film that emerged from the concert. In that film, the rural openness, the torrents of music, the overflowing crowds merged into a single definitive image: a huge community drawn together by its music, a culture overwhelming in size and dedicated to the experience of being overwhelmed, of losing personal identity to a transcendent group identity. What *Woodstock* gave a name and an image to was the set of values that succeeded the ones frozen in place at the end of *New York, New York*.

The Last Waltz doesn't find this image in the audience; the performers will it into being on the stage, and Scorsese fixes it on the screen. The audience might almost not be there: we hear their applause, faintly, and the brief glimpses of them at the beginning and the end of the concert are ghostly, indistinct. The calculated *mise en scene* tells us that the values celebrated by *Woodstock* no longer bind the performers to the audience, but only bind the performers to each other. The group identity is all on stage now, it's The Band and their guests, now no longer an image of community so much as a community of images, perpetuating on stage what recently existed on a much larger scale beyond it. What *The Last Waltz* is celebrating, after all, is the end of The Band's 'live' relationship to the audience.

Their connections to each other, however, are still alive: that's what distinguishes the exhilarating performances in *The Last Waltz* from the deadening numbers that end *New York, New York*, and that's what Scorsese focuses on in the confined space of Winterland. His camera is as mobile as *Mean Streets*, his editing as quick and precise as *Taxi Driver*'s, sometimes with the rhythm of the music and sometimes with a rhythm entirely its own, framing the members of the group individually, as a whole, and, it seems, in every possible combination. The wide shots place the musicians in their elegant, elegiac setting; the two-shots catch the fast, mysteriously familiar messages that pass between them; the close-ups record their exhausted, end-of-the-party joy. Scorsese's portrait of the

group performing at Winterland is both lyrical and thoroughly analytic, a triumph of style for him and his team of cameramen that matches the musicians' triumph on stage.

But Scorsese is also telling a story in *The Last Waltz*, in his elliptical, retrospective manner, the story of what happened to everybody between the 50s and the 70s. As in *New York, New York*, he's telling the story of a culture and he's again locating the culture's defining image at its endpoint, the point of exhaustion, of death. His interviews with The Band impose a rough biographical

prayer-like compositions of his own, 'Forever Young' and 'I Shall Be Released'. We can read in them the story of Dylan's next public incarnation, as an evangelical Christian.

This method of isolating a face, a performance, a moment of identity that implies a story, that embodies the experience that created it, is a natural technique for documentary: since real stories can't always be filmed in progress, and often can't even be identified as stories until they're over, documentary filmmakers inevitably tell many of their stories retrospectively. This technique—



The Last Waltz:
(from left) Van Morrison, Bob Dylan,
Robbie Robertson.

structure, but everything we see is in the present, a re-creation, a copy with no original to compare it to—or an original that exists only in our own memories. What Scorsese is trying to create in *The Last Waltz*, in all his films since *Taxi Driver*, is a narrative of inference: he gives us the images, the re-creations, the achieved identities, and we tell ourselves the story. For this purpose, of course, the best images are those that are densest with associations, the best identities those that are highly defined.

When Bob Dylan appears on stage in *The Last Waltz*, a small, opaque presence, his face half hidden underneath an incongruously dandyish white hat, our story-making machinery goes into high gear. We tell ourselves how his stardom—based on his ability to articulate the audience's feelings, the ideas they can't quite articulate themselves—has isolated him from the audience, made him unreachable, has isolated him, it seems, even from The Band. They seem to disappear behind him, as if they were still his backup band. The Band play modestly behind Dylan, and they're mostly outside the frame—although the camera does catch Robbie Robertson, the obvious leader on every other number in the film, shooting wary glances at Dylan, watching him, trying to follow. And looking at the film now, we can read another story in the songs Dylan performs at Winterland—an old blues by the Reverend Gary Davis, and two yearning,

which depends on establishing the audience's perception of a gap between the person or image we're watching on the screen and what the person once was, what the image once meant—in Scorsese obviously goes beyond the demands of documentary: he builds these gaps into his fiction films as well.

In his next feature, *Raging Bull* (which he once referred to as 'a documentary with actors'), he creates a narrative gap even more radical than *New York, New York*: when the camera again picks up La Motta, years after the end of his boxing career, he's so totally transformed that it takes us a while to recognise him. And in *The King of Comedy*, Scorsese has taken the next step, showing us only the transformation, the re-created image, the final state of identity that's self-defining and self-parodic. The only references to the pasts of the characters are glancing and allusive, as in a documentary: Rupert Pupkin's childhood is somewhere in the shadows of his climactic monologue, like the stories of The Band and Dylan and Woodstock in the music of *The Last Waltz*; Jerry Langford's story is present on screen only in a brief pan across the photos on his mantelpiece—like the home movies of the boy Steven Prince which punctuate Prince's sordid, disturbing monologue in Scorsese's documentary profile *American Boy*.

With *The King of Comedy*, Scorsese completes what he began in *New York, New York*, moves beyond elliptical, discontinuous narrative to a form that isn't really narrative at all, but a kind of still life. The gap between a character's, or a culture's, past and its frozen, definitive identity in the present doesn't exist any more, because Scorsese has stopped representing the movement of the past on screen, has eliminated the process of becoming: now the gap is between the film and the audience, between our own memories and associations and the fixed objects of contemplation on the screen.

When Scorsese cast Jerry Lewis, he already had the actor framed: 'Lewis brought to *The King of Comedy* a fuller entertainment, show business character than real talk-show host Johnny Carson, who was considered for the part. He's been an actor, a director of some note, a stand-up comic, a comedian in skits, part of an act, the Dean Martin-Jerry Lewis act... he's the epitome of the Las Vegas entertainer. He's a philanthropist, with a national image as that [as host of the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation's annual fund-raising telethon]—a national image as a man who's a philanthropist who, pushed far enough, could go over the deep end on television, right in front of you. That tension, I think, is real in him. In his telethon, that's part of the thing that gets the money, therefore it has to be pushed—and he can act it, but I think it's real. At a certain point, you get so tired you let all your guard down, and you just let it be seen, what you are, how you're feeling at the moment... And that alone is amazing, that tension: the way he turns, the way he looks, the way he glances at people...'

None of this background is actually represented in the film, but it's all supposed to be there somehow, incarnated in Jerry Lewis. He is the most interesting thing in the movie: his scenes are like pieces of a documentary on Jerry Lewis—which is, perhaps, the film Scorsese really wanted to make. But it's De Niro as Rupert Pupkin whose face holds the screen for most of *The King of Comedy*, right up to the final image, and it's a face with no history, nothing to document: the gap we'd have to cross to find Pupkin's story is nearly infinite, like the long, bare corridor we see him standing at the end of, fixed before a photo of the audience.

If there's a story to be read in the frozen features of *The King of Comedy*, it's a story of exhaustion: the exhaustion of its creator translated into a vision of a whole culture's exhaustion. The key scenes in this story are *New York, New York* and *The Last Waltz*. *New York, New York* was Scorsese's try for a masterpiece, a work he kept putting more and more into in the attempt to overwhelm the audience—and it didn't play. He speaks of it now as 'a big lesson'. 'It's a good movie, I just think it's a little meandering at times. All the scenes have to be there in order to tell the story fully, but I wish we'd found ways to combine two or three scenes and make one scene. That's the

trick, that was the thing to do. But that's the way we learned.'

He learned to tell his stories within tighter structures, yes, but he also learned to put less of himself in. And he learned to abandon the exploratory attitude and style of the earlier films in favour of a style that brutally appropriates faces and images for a preconceived end. One of many fascinating things in *American Boy* is Scorsese's unusually honest portrait of himself as director: we see him prodding his subject to tell this or that story; we see him, at one point, wearily motioning the camera off himself, directing it back to Prince; and we even see him, at the end, cajoling his subject into two extra takes of his final anecdote, forcing him to tell the story just as he told it to Scorsese before the filming, so it ends with just the words the director wants. We end, in *American Boy*, with an identity that's rock-hard and totally ambiguous in its origins: a 'Steven Prince' who's created himself, or been created as product by his culture and his times, or been created by the director. There's no telling, and Scorsese—and, for that matter, Prince—probably don't know, either.

It's the sort of question that *New York, New York* struggled with, groping, improvising, exploring its way toward answers that weren't, finally, fully coherent. *The Last Waltz*, which attempts to create a final image for a restless, improvising, exploratory period in history, and for a music which had tried to weave every popular tradition into one overwhelming sound, is also Scorsese's final image of the large, inclusive, energetic spirit that failed him in *New York, New York*. It's The Band's farewell to their diminished audience, in a culture that's simply worn out from the effort of making itself up as it goes along, exhausted with its own experiments.

The Band are tired after all the years on the road, too tired to keep knocking themselves out for an audience that doesn't respond the same way any more. They're tired and disappointed, and so's the culture, and so's Scorsese, but the recognition that it's all over seems to energise everyone: this is it, no more road beyond this, there's no sense holding back. The Band and Scorsese built a frame for their final image, carefully—but once they've placed themselves inside, they just let it rip. The music is alive, and very moving; so is the film-making. Scorsese holds to the frame and provides The Band with its defining image; since their essence is movement, the frame, to be true to its subjects, has to keep moving with them—and when it moves, it defines the film-maker's identity as well.

In *The Last Waltz* Scorsese is too busy being himself to worry about the origins of identity, the source of images. But from then on, the question takes on some urgency, since the films have gradually closed in on themselves, like La Motta huddling in a corner of the ring, protecting himself from his opponent's blows; they've stopped providing the images of process or development that might



The King of Comedy: Pupkin outsmarting the law.

explain where the rocklike identities come from. *Raging Bull* gives us a little—at least the 'bull' La Motta gets to snort and stomp around a little within the ropes—but *The King of Comedy* yields nothing, just characters defined by a culture grown so dense, so overpowering, that the very idea of development seems ludicrous. It's all imitation, repetition, and Scorsese is content—or perhaps feels doomed—to imitate the flat, plain style of Hollywood's overpowering tradition. 'It plays,' Scorsese says of his latest film. 'It plays with an audience.' But what audience is it? The same audience that rejected the explorations of *New York, New York*? The same audience that laughs at Rupert Pupkin's jokes?

If we try to read Scorsese's story from

the temporary endpoint of *The King of Comedy*, we'd have to read it as a story of fatigue, disillusionment, and finally disgust with the culture for which he produces images. We could choose, as his defining image, his own brief scene in the picture, playing the director of 'The Jerry Langford Show' who records the static, blurry video image of Pupkin that goes out to America. Or we could choose to define Scorsese by his peaks, like *The Last Waltz*, and choose an image like The Band's Levon Helm beating furiously, ecstatically on his drums while he sings, with unaccountable exuberance, 'Why do the best things always disappear?'—an image of Scorsese's work that hasn't lost its meaning yet, that resonates across the gap. ■

The King of Comedy.





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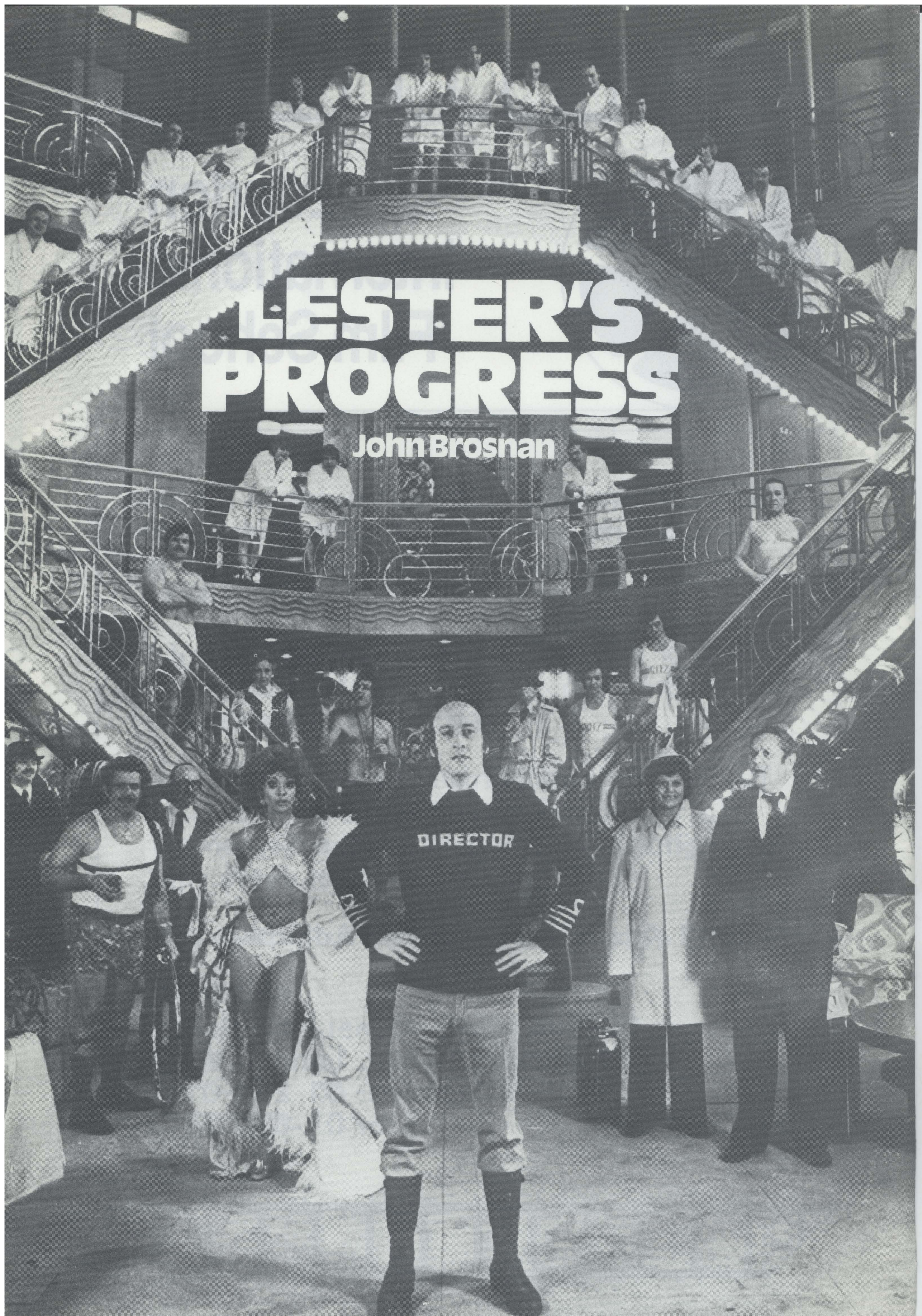
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LESTER'S PROGRESS

John Brosnan

Knowing of Richard Lester's predilection for making small, tightly controlled films on subjects to which he has some emotional commitment, it is still difficult to understand his involvement with the multi-million dollar *Superman* series. In his office at Pine-wood Studios, where he has been supervising the finishing touches to *Superman 3*, Lester himself candidly admits that he and Superman were not exactly made for each other. 'I'm not a comic book freak like some directors—Alain Resnais, for example. It's not something I have much understanding of. I feel that whatever comedy I do has to come out of a pure social reality, as in the opening sequence of *Butch and Sundance*. A man comes out of prison and goes to buy a gun, but he can't afford a case of bullets because he has to buy his wife a washing machine. We researched the fact that you could buy a hand-cranked washing machine for the same price as a hundred bullets for an ordinary pistol, therefore he can only afford a dozen bullets. And throughout the rest of the film, no one goes round firing off bullets wildly because we have established that they were expensive. That's the approach I like to take, but I couldn't do that with *Superman* because it is all cardboard and I feel I'm not very good with that. I'm better at taking fantasy and giving it at least the illusion of some kind of social reality.'

The third *Superman* is the one on which Lester has had the greatest measure of artistic control (though he directed Part 2, sections had already been shot by Richard Donner), and it seems that social reality may be creeping in. 'This one actually opens in a mid-town unemployment office in what is obviously a depressed state, which certainly wasn't the style of the first two. I mean, no one cared about how Lois Lane, a working reporter, paid for her penthouse apartment in Part 1. We wanted to start very small, go back to middle America—to Smallville itself, Superman's home town—and build from there. We had exhausted the outer space stuff on the first two pictures, so I felt we should be earthbound this time. And that's why I was so anxious to write in a part for someone like Richard Pryor, because he does bring a reality and a different kind of feel to the film. So I think 3 does have an element of reality in all this nonsense...'

Lester's road to *Superman* actually began in the late 1960s, when after a string of commercial successes (*A Hard Day's Night*, *Help!*, *The Knack*, etc) his career began to falter with the box-office disaster of *The Bed Sitting Room*. From then on he was dogged by bad luck, project after project collapsed under him, and it was not until 1973 that he made another movie. This, of course, was *The Three Musketeers* for Alexander and Ilya Salkind, who later were to produce *Superman*.

'Things really began to go wrong after *Petulia*,' said Lester. 'For all sorts of reasons it was a very depressing time for me. We had been set to do a four-handed piece based on a screenplay by Joe Orton,

which at that point he had only roughed out. It was called *Up Against It*, with the subtitle *Prick Up Your Ears*. It was going to star Mick Jagger and Ian McKellen and two girls and was a musical about politics. That sounds terribly old hat now, but this was 1967. But the day we were to start work on the screenplay with Joe was the day he was murdered. Oscar Lewenstein, the producer, had sent the car for him and the driver rang back to say that he kept ringing the bell but couldn't get an answer. We finally told the driver to look through the letter box and he did so and saw a pair of legs on the floor. He called back from the telephone box and then it was a case of getting the agent and then the police and then breaking in and finding the bodies.

'After that, I was grabbing writers and asking: "Can you adapt what was only a rough outline of Joe's?" Nobody could because his style was so individual. It then occurred to me that we should try to tack Joe's ideas and political feelings on to another subject, and out of nowhere we picked up *The Bed Sitting Room* and started work on it very quickly, without even informing United Artists who were still expecting this pop musical with Mick Jagger. I don't think I had prepared it very well. I had gone to Cannes in the meantime and got involved in all the trouble that happened that year, 1968. I was actually caught up in the police baton charge. And the collapse of the festival was bad for me personally, because the release pattern of *Petulia* had been geared to Cannes. The result was that it didn't open in Paris until November and in London Warners, who hated the movie, opened it at the Curzon without announcing it.

'I came back from Cannes feeling very depressed, and I started shooting *The Bed Sitting Room* the next day. It was a pessimistic picture to begin with, and during the shooting I became more and

The Bed Sitting Room: Spike Milligan.



more depressed. We did our best with it, that's all I can say. I still feel it had some interesting things to say but they seemed swamped by the bleakness. The bleakness of the settings destroyed everything.'

Lester's next film was to have been *Send Him Victorious*, about a right wing backlash over Rhodesia and the kidnapping and supposed execution of Prince Charles. 'It was a super book written by Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond and we had quite an impressive cast including Ralph Richardson and Jeanne Moreau. We were about four or five weeks off shooting when the money was taken away by United Artists. I think their reason was that the film was too political and that audiences in America didn't even know where Rhodesia was. The latter may have been a valid reason, I suppose. So it was a wipe-out. I then tried to set it up myself and paid everyone's salaries for about five weeks; I bankrupted myself and that was the end of it. That was in 1969, and then in 1970 came the *Flashman* fiasco. Again it was a case of being only four weeks from shooting when United Artists pulled out. They didn't give a reason this time, but that was the year they had declared a loss of \$90m and were axing all sorts of pictures, including Kubrick's *Napoleon*. But I had spent a year preparing *Flashman*—a year's work for which not only was I not paid but I ended up paying out a lot of money myself. Charles Wood had written the screenplay and John Alderton was to play Flashman. We were going to shoot it in Spain, with Granada standing in for Afghanistan.

'There were a couple of other projects after that but they never got very far. One based on a book called *The Trespassers*; one a Glenda Jackson picture about a schoolteacher. I just couldn't find finance to get them going. For all practical purposes, for the pictures I wanted to do, I was unemployable. And the pictures I was offered both by major studios and by independents were not things I felt I wanted to touch. I made commercials during this time and did very well financially, but from March 1969 until May 1973 I didn't turn the cameras on a feature film...'

The Three Musketeers changed all that for Lester. 'That came about when the Salkinds telephoned from Paris saying they had a project they wanted to talk about. I went to see them, and wasn't interested at first when I heard it was *The Three Musketeers* because I thought I knew the book. They said, "Would you at least read it again, please?" So I got the book and realised that I had never read the *original* before. And after the first two hundred pages I phoned them and said, "Yes, I'll do it. I don't care what the money is, just tell me when to start."

'What mainly attracted me was the rather interesting and cynical attitude Dumas takes to his heroes and their relationship to the political structure of the time. I was also attracted by the challenge of presenting the 17th century more realistically than had been done

before in films. The point is that the audience has a "memory" about that century, or any other, because of previous films; so a period is never constant in films or in the way we look at it. I'm not saying our version was the way it really was: it's just that the 1973 *Three Musketeers* looks at the 17th century in a different way from, say, the 1948 version.

'It's difficult, however, when you are dealing with a story where many of the characters belong to the nobility. We piled wax and mud and dirt on to those wigs the actors wore, so much so that they hated the thought of having to put them on every morning, but when you see them on the great cinema screen they all look very pretty. We never cleaned any of the costumes, but it doesn't show. Unless you show people actually urinating in the corners of rooms by the tapestries, which is what they used to do, it means nothing. And if you did that you would be overplaying your hand.'

'The actual making of *The Three Musketeers* was like running a big chess game, because the stars were only available at different times yet had to appear in the same scenes. You just had to cut little pieces of film together to give the illusion that all these actors were together. We had exactly eighteen weeks in all of shooting in which everything was shot out of continuity because we could only afford each actor for a certain number of weeks.'

After *The Three Musketeers* and its sequel *The Four Musketeers* (which was shot at the same time), Lester made *Juggernaut*, a thriller about a bomb disposal team faced with defusing a number of explosive devices on a cruise ship. 'I was brought in only about ten days before the filming began. What particularly interested me about it was the concept of having each character represent a different point of view about how governments and people and police respond to hijacking and that kind of terrorism. Also I've been on a lot of ships in my life and they fascinate me: they really are floating feudal systems, the last remnants of feudal life. Where I had estimated wrongly was in thinking it would be possible to rewrite the script in ten days, as well as partially recasting the picture, and in that time get what I wanted to put into it. I think I got some of it, but I realised I couldn't mess about with the basic structure. If I had taken enough bits out of the thriller structure to put in what I wanted, the thriller itself would have fallen apart. But I would like to have been able to do more. The Americans didn't like it because they said it was a disaster picture with no disaster. But what I found interesting was the similarity in political attitude between the man who planted the bombs and the man who defused them.'

Lester's next film was *Royal Flash*, starring Malcolm McDowell as George MacDonald Fraser's anti-hero. Why hadn't he made the more interesting *Flashman* as he had originally planned? 'For one thing, the price had gone up. Secondly, I had the feeling, after putting



(Above) *The Three Musketeers*:
Geraldine Chaplin,
Jean-Pierre Cassel,
Richard Lester.



(Right) *Butch and Sundance — The Early Days*.

(Left) *Royal Flash*:
In Bavaria.

(Below) *Robin and Marian*:
Sean Connery,
Nicol Williamson,
mounted.



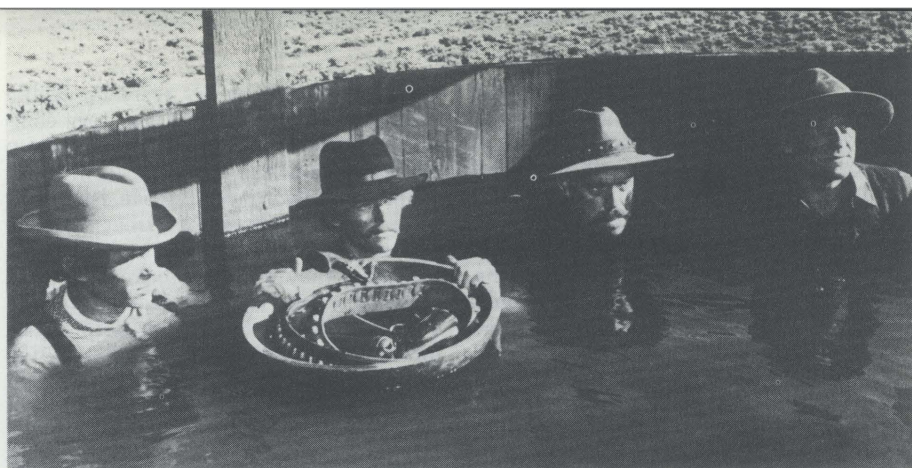
so much work into *Flashman*, that I had already made the film even though it never reached the shooting stage. It was dead. It was over, and I couldn't work up the enthusiasm for it again. *Royal Flash* seemed a more containable and less British subject, and therefore one that might be more easily financed. All the same, the money was again pulled out at the last minute by United Artists, this time only four days before shooting, but I was able to move it to Fox.' The actual shooting of the film in Bavaria, however, was difficult, and Lester is not happy with the way the picture turned out. 'It was hell to make. Not because of the actors—I liked the cast very much—but let's say I was less happy with the crew. I think Germany is a difficult place to shoot in. Or it was then.'

Then came what many consider Lester's best film of the 70s, *Robin and Marian*, made particularly interesting by the fact that his approach to the subject was different from that of both the scriptwriter and the distributors, who saw it as a bitter-sweet romance. 'The idea came from James Goldman, who wrote it as an original screenplay on commission to Columbia in 1972. I heard about it and loved the idea, but it went from one director to another, was abandoned, picked up again, abandoned—then I thought I had it to myself but they unexpectedly took it away from me and gave it to Ray Stark to produce. He offered it to another director and then finally it came back to me, but with strings attached.'

'What I loved was the concept of taking well-known figures familiar to the audience and making them twenty years older. They are still recognisable yet are totally different from the stereotyped images, behaving in political, psychological and emotional ways which are the reverse of what you might expect. They are no longer radicals, for one thing: their political thinking has shifted ninety degrees to the right, as happens to many radicals as they grow older. Added to that was the concept of Robin Hood as a small-time robber who had been inspired by a great emotional ideal that sent him off to the Crusades. Now he's back, disillusioned, trying to relive his past—trying to live up to an old image which was probably just a myth in any case.'

'He has come back to find that the world has passed him by. In fact the only person who has become anything since he left is the Sheriff of Nottingham. He has taught himself to read and write and become a liberal and an intellectual. He is even trying to look after the people. But Robin ends up making a general nuisance of himself: he keeps charging off dramatically through fields of crops, destroying things for the sake of a Quixotic attitude. And he kills the only person who is doing something for the county—the Sheriff.'

'I got about thirty per cent of that into the finished picture, but I like it. I think it's a good picture. But it was wrongly handled at the time of its release. It was a film that we shot under the title *The Death of Robin Hood*, yet Ray Stark put



it out with the sub-heading "Love is the Greatest Adventure of All". That isn't the film it was. I mean, forty-eight pages of the script are under the same bloody tree. It was an intimate film of ideas which I shot in six weeks but the distributors tried to give the impression of an epic. And because of the effort that went into the packaging it became a \$5m picture set under a tree.'

Lester's next film was an independent production, *The Ritz*, based on a successful Broadway farce, which he filmed at Twickenham in only four weeks and on a mere million dollar budget. 'I read the script and just found it very funny. I also found it a very affectionate piece by an author who actually seemed to like all his characters, in contrast to the current trend in film comedy. But I was careful about not seeing the stage version and perhaps if I had seen it I wouldn't have made the film. Later I heard a tape of one of the performances—this was when I was well into pre-production—and I was horrified by the sound of it.'

It was after *The Ritz* that Lester agreed to become a producer on *Superman* and help bring the then sprawling production under control. But while working on that picture he decided to make his first and probably last Western, the 'prequel' to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* called *Butch and Sundance—The Early Days*. 'I don't know what happened with that film,' Lester admits. 'I liked the script that Bill Goldman sent me. He had only supervised the writing of it, it was written by someone called Alan Burns, but it read delightfully. I thought it was a marvellous challenge to see if I could pull it off with two unknown kids—to cast people who look as though they are going to grow up and look like the actors in *Butch Cassidy*. And I was attracted to the Victoriana aspect of the film. I kept saying to myself that I wasn't making a Western, I was making a Victorian film. I don't particularly like Westerns. I have no feeling for them...'

'All the time we were making the film we kept coming up against closed doors. We would say, "What we need here is a nice action sequence which will do so-and-so," but everything we thought of we couldn't do because of the other film. I came to realise that by doing a "prequel" we had painted ourselves into a corner, and as a result it promised more than it achieved. It had a goodish surface, but I'm beginning to think that's a dangerous

thing to say about films because I would say the same about *Cuba*. That's another film which to my mind hasn't worked, but on the surface—the top layer of the film; the way the images fit together—I think it is terrific.'

'*Cuba* was an original idea of mine. I saw it through from beginning to end, so the only person I can blame is myself. The problem is, what kind of a film is it? Is it a documentary on the last three days of a city changing from the height of capitalist decadence to an idealistic society? But as we started writing this, we thought, "This is a film about extras. We must have a major interest at the centre of it all." So we put in a major interest. We put in Sean Connery. But then the audience will think, "Oh, Sean Connery. That means it's a love story, or an adventure story, or a post-Bond story." And the original story, about Cuba itself, disappears. I kept fighting myself about this and never got it right. It was a hopeless, total mess-up. But a lot of people find it interesting, and one lovely thing is that every time it plays at the National Film Theatre it sells out. I find it interesting myself. But the reviews both here and in America were mainly bad; it was called "an odious film", among other things...'

One criticism was that Brooke Adams was obviously too young to have had an affair years ago with Sean Connery... 'It was quite funny about that. It was my private little concept in using Brooke Adams. Spanish Americans develop very quickly, like the granddaughter of a friend of mine who is absolutely breathtaking, very worldly and sophisticated, but is only twelve years old, and I loved the thought that this soldier had had an affair with one of these Latin American child/women. He has remembered it for years, building it up in his mind, and yet this memory he has held for so long is just of a schoolgirl. And the girl has grown up, has her own life and has forgotten about it. So that is why I used Brooke. As a matter of fact Ann-Margret had agreed to play the part. Now I think she is a wonderful actress and she might have made it into a very different film; but by the same token it might have become a very different love story, and even more of why I was interested in making the film would have disappeared.'

'Our main achievement with *Cuba* was probably reproducing Havana in Spain in the middle of winter for very little money and with no "toys", no airforce, no tanks,

etc. We had been promised a good deal of military hardware, but just before we started filming someone shot the head of the Civil Guard in Madrid and consequently all the military were put on full alert. They withdrew all our permissions regarding equipment, so that in essence I was faced at the end of the movie with creating a battle with only two Land Rovers with plastic sides that made them look like tanks.

'I also had one B26, which flew in from Cornwall but on its first take crashed into a four-foot-high tree and had to limp back to the airport completely out of action. On big films when this happens, you call up the place in Arizona where they keep all these old planes in moth-balls and order a replacement, but I didn't have that kind of film. The plane was supposed to have come in low over the train at the end and take Martin Balsam's head off with its propellor, but even the train didn't work. There was only one like it in Spain and it burst its boiler on the first take. So that Anna Karenina look of the train was in fact a mistake—it had just blown up. For the whole last section of the film, in effect, we had nothing but a few Land Rovers, a plane at Malaga airport and a train that wouldn't move, and I had to *ad lib* the whole battle. It wasn't the way we intended it to be; it didn't have the weight and structure. Originally there was to be a much more detailed relationship between the two armies and *how* they fought, as well as the unexpectedness of one side's capitulation. All that had been carefully worked out, but we had nothing to do it with. We just had a few extras and a cane field.'

Once free of *Superman*, and Lester is determined that Part 3 will be the last he will be involved with, he intends to return again to more personal projects. One of these is with his long-time collaborator Charles Wood (who also scripted *Cuba*) and is based on one of the stories in the book *The Red Monarch*. 'David Puttnam is doing something on the same

book, but I'm doing my story for Robin Williams, who will play a not very competent Shakespearean actor who ends up having to play the title role in a movie called *The Young Stalin*. He isn't very good at first because they treat him like dirt, so they realise that if he is going to act Stalin they will have to treat him like Stalin. So they let him *nearly* have his own car—he has to share it with a performing bear—and give him all the luxuries, like Perry Como records and a friendship scroll from the President of the American Screen Actors' Guild, Ronald Reagan . . . If you like, it will be my attempt to do with Stalin what Chaplin did with Hitler in *The Great Dictator*. It will be done almost as a silent film.

'Setting it up has been difficult, as you can imagine. The head of Universal said, "I don't want to see another film about goddam commies." Another studio said, "It's a terrific script, why can't we set it in America?" I mean, who do they think it could be about, Jimmy Carter? It has been a long struggle, but I think we are now financially in place.'

Lester's other project is a screen version of Conrad's *Victory*, for which Harold Pinter has written the screenplay. 'I have been trying to set it up for seven years. I finally winkled the rights out of Universal. Again it's a very personal project, and in both cases I am trying to finance the films myself. *Victory*, I hope, should be quite a cheap film. It only has about seven people in it, and all it needs in the way of sets is a house, a grain store and a jetty, which will be easy enough to build. You also need the hotel and harbour at Surabaya, but they won't be difficult to prepare.

'What attracts me to the story is simply that I think it's a marvellous piece of cinema. A man has gone through life without ever being moved by anything—his father had said, "Look on and make no sound," and that has become his way of dealing with life. By accident he helps a young girl, they begin this marvellous love affair, and at the moment it starts to go right three total villains, by chance as

it were, are set on his trail, misled by the belief that he has money. And so, as the love story flowers, you just see this boat coming and you know disaster will follow. It seems to me that this is terrific cinema and *pure* cinema: it's where the images should do a lot and the emotions are there without speech. Harold is the perfect man to write the screenplay.'

But does Lester think there is still a market in the commercial cinema for small, personal movies? 'If I didn't feel that I would be in despair. I may be deluding myself. We may all be clutching on to the edge of a cliff. But I think *Chariots of Fire* was a personal film of sorts and it certainly found a market, so I hope it's not self-delusion. We all feel we should make our best films on subjects that we care about or have some knowledge of: they're in some way autobiographical or they deal with a subject that has always fascinated or disturbed us or made us curious. *Superman* has never done that to me, which is why I never really thought I should be involved with it. And now, having been involved with three *Superman* films, I can't say that any of those descriptions about why one should make films apply. But I genuinely feel I am now a better film-maker because of them. I used to make films in a kind of smash and grab manner, working on my nerves, trying to get a burst of exuberance or panic or hysteria going among the crew, the actors, myself, literally dragging everyone else along. That's fine when you are doing a four or six week shoot and you are thirty, but I'm over fifty now and I don't know how long I would be able to keep that up. So in planning for the future—a kind of retirement policy—I have had to see whether I could make films the *other* way. With *Superman 3* it was a fifteen week shoot, and you can't roar around the way I used to for fifteen weeks. I have had to learn to work in a more straightforward, craftsmanlike way, more like a cabinet-maker's job. And that is what I personally have got out of the *Superman* films: a sense of craftsmanship.'

Cuba: Returning the ball.



National Film Theatre

America and Heaven's Gate



From 13 - 16 August the NFT will be presenting the first-ever British screenings of the full-length, original version of Michael Cimino's **Heaven's Gate**. In 70mm and six-track Dolby Stereo. 205 minutes. At 2.00pm and 6.30pm daily.

Michael Cimino will be giving a **Guardian Lecture** on 11 August.

In connection with the screenings of **Heaven's Gate** the NFT will be having a season entitled 'America, Americana', about the

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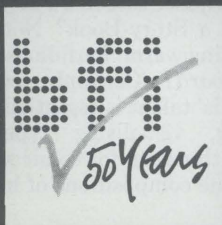
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La Vie est un Roman: Fanny Ardant, Ruggero Raimondi.



Pauline à la Plage: Rosette, Pascal Greggory.



UN

DEUX

TROIS

'THERE IS NOTHING quite like that moment,' Pauline Kael once said, 'when the lights go down and all our hopes are concentrated on the screen.' This particular screen is dark, so dark that its contours are all but effaced by the gloom of the auditorium as the names of the quartet of principals, each supported by a red, pencil-thin underline, materialise upon it: Vittorio Gassman ... Ruggero Raimondi ... Geraldine Chaplin ... Fanny Ardant ... *Raimondi was Losey's Don Giovanni, of course, and Fanny Ardant, now wasn't she in Truffaut's 'La*

Films by Resnais, Rohmer and the Straubs by Gilbert Adair

Femme à côté? And why hasn't some bright spark thought to cast Geraldine Chaplin opposite Diane Keaton ...? To the introductory chord of a sinister, velvety, plain chocolate waltz, the main title fills the screen, LA VIE EST UN ROMAN, with the thin red filament forming the braid, so to speak, of another screen within the screen. Note too, in passing, the lighting cameraman's credit, not Sacha Vierny but Bruno Nuytten; that of the composer, one Philippe-Gérard (*his name, inverted ...*); and the 'participation', as the formula has it, of Cathy Berberian—*she must have died, poor thing, not long after 'participating'.* There remains only 'Réalisation de ...', last of the veils to be lifted from that oblong swathe of alternative reality on which all our hopes are concentrated. Then Action! A new Alain Resnais film is about to unfold.

La Vie est un Roman is a folly, in the architectural sense of the word, the sense in which it is applied to Beckford's Font-hill, the Watts Tower in downtown Los Angeles and whatever it is that Edward James is even now constructing, like some affable, patient Fitzcarraldo, in the rain forests of Central America. As a film, it is utterly without antecedents, a prime number, indivisible except by itself and I (the latter being, in this non-mathematical context, the *conditio sine qua non* of every film, i.e. the fact of comprising a suite of images projected on to a screen). Everything about it proves to be deceptive, from its trite and untranslatable title onwards, an affirmative paraphrase of Napoleon's truism: 'La vie n'est pas un roman'. Life is a Novel? Wrong, somehow, and it would look terrible on a marquee. Life is a Fairy-Tale? Hum. Life is a Story-Book? Not quite, but we're getting warm. Perfidiously, Life is a Storyboard? Certainly not, for though Resnais' talent is essentially of an image-making, visualising type, and though his enthusiasm for comic strips is well known, the compositions of his films

(*Marienbad* excepted) bear not the slightest trace of pre-existent sketches. In fact, those of *La Vie est un Roman* are surprisingly 'open'.

The plot—or rather, plots? There are three in all, three discrete narrative entities linked by a common location, as well as by a thematic consistency that is only gradually revealed.

One, in the teens of this century, Michel Forbek (Raimondi—the character's surname, will you note, is a near anagram of 'Beckford'), a fabulously wealthy, megalomaniac dilettante, plans to erect a Radiant City, Wellsian, Wellesian and Orwellian, in the depths of the Ardennes (or Arden) Forest, where, at the beginning of the film, he has summoned a group of friends and like-thinkers for the unveiling of a perfectly scaled model. Among them is dark, doe-eyed Livia (Ardant), with whom he is hopelessly smitten. But World War I intervenes (as illustrated by a strange, 'gratuitous' shot of the model in flames), Forbek's fortune is decimated and what subsists of the projected City is its Temple of Happiness, a gabled, spired and turreted monstrosity, a gaudy Noah's Ark sheltering every imaginable architectural style from Byzantine to Bakelite *moderne*. Those of his guests who are still prepared to submit to Forbek's Utopian design are ordered to divest themselves of their tuxedos and evening gowns (in exchange for some rather sweet gold lamé kimonos), their emotional ties and their memories in the cloakroom of the Future. A higher order of mankind seems poised to rise from the ashes—except that Livia, with a healthy scorn for all forms of systematised happiness, only pretends to swallow the sickly green liqueur that Ti-Han, Forbek's faithful Chinese servant, proffers each of them in turn...

Two, it is 1983. Forbek's Temple has survived a second World War and squats incongruously in the forest, like a pop-up album left out in the garden at teatime. It now houses a 'progressive' school, the Holberg Institute (an oddly realistic touch, this, it being just what tends to happen to such otherwise redundant 'follies'), in which a seminar is already under way on the theme of 'The Education of the Imagination'. Among the writers, teachers and sociologists who have been invited to attend are the ebullient Fourierist architect Walter Guarini (Gassman) and his ex-companion Nora Winkle (Chaplin), an American anthropologist and author of a thesis on 'The Sexual Fantasies of Working Class Males in the Canadian North'. As often happens at seminars, however, the debates soon degenerate into barbed *ad hominem* (and *feminam*) assaults and counter-assaults, a round of Musical Beds is carried on behind the scenes (seminars, like Caribbean cruises and sojourns on health farms, are awfully good conductors—in the electrical sense—of sexuality) and it all ends in fiasco when naïve, earnest Elizabeth (Sabine Azéma—a major discovery) wheels in another scale model, an educational aid in the shape of a Lego-esque landscape with detachable parts, whose implications for the imaginative

faculty set everyone at each other's throats. Meanwhile...

Three, obliged to spend their summer break at the school are two young children (joined later by Nora's little daughter). While their elders puzzle over how to educate the imagination, this trio sets about exercising it. And what they imagine is, more or less, *Prince Valiant*, whose comic strip dragons, rightful heirs to the throne and damsels in distress spring into three-dimensional life amid the Gothic light-fittings and Grauman's Theater chinoiserie of Forbek's vision.

And the message? Oscar Wilde once remarked that no map of the world was worthy of serious consideration unless it found room for Utopia. Yet the charm of Utopia, surely, is that it possesses neither latitude nor longitude: put it on the map, and you saddle it with a constitution, a parliament, red tape, offshore fishing rights and party political broadcasts. Though Forbek, the strong man, the benevolent Mabuse, the self-styled Christopher Columbus of this Utopia, is fragmented, seventy years on, into a committee of well-intentioned, petty-minded and eternally squabbling bureaucrats of universal harmony, nothing fundamental has changed. Even Prince Valiant, no sooner crowned King Valiant, would probably have to renege on most of his pre-coronation promises to the downtrodden peasantry. Grown-ups, the film would appear to be saying, are only children comically decked out in their parents' clothes, while it is the children themselves, paradoxically, who live each moment of their lives as though there were no tomorrows.

All pretty banal sounding stuff. And, beyond question, it is in its exclusively intellectual discourse that *La Vie est un Roman* (like *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*) is weakest. Notwithstanding the ironic detachment which Resnais seems on occasion to be observing vis-à-vis the

didacticism of these works, it would be silly to question his basic sincerity. *He believes*. However, as a couple of random remarks taken from the press-book may demonstrate, there is rather more to it than that.

On the subject of the film's gestation, its scenarist, Jean Gruault (who also wrote *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*), states, 'We decided to create only what we ourselves, as spectators, wished to see on the screen,' and he adds, 'So what we were looking for was a form that we could be at ease with, and a moral (the word is a trifle pompous, but there it is...) corresponding to what we wished to see.' (My emphasis.) Resnais, as we know, has always been stymied in those projects closest to his heart. But, just as he cunningly diverted the gist of his unrealised Lovecraft adaptation into the cold, marbly visuals of *Providence*, so, in *La Vie est un Roman*, there is about Forbek something of both Mandrake the Magician and Harry Dickson, while the serio-comic antics in and around the Temple reminded me of Tintin's adventures at the château of Moulinart (where he lives, off and on, with Captain Haddock) and, in particular, of Hergé's masterpiece, *Les Bijoux de la Castafiore*. Resnais, a self-admitted Tintinophile, may well be alluding to this with the somewhat unnaturalistic 'cartoon' squawk of a raven accompanying the film's very first image.

Secondly, there is an observation echoed by virtually everyone who collaborated on the film. They were, it turns out, all amazed by how little one's responses are jolted by its abrupt shifts from past to present and from present to 'les temps légendaires'. This in spite of the fact that the three narratives are designed, lit and performed in dramatically contrasting styles: Forbek's scenes in an atmosphere of 'Franjudex' melodrama; those of the seminar in, frankly, the manner of Boulevard comedy; and those involving the Prince Valiant figure (complete with paintings on glass by the

***La Vie est un Roman:*
Michel Forbek (Ruggero Raimondi)
and the faithful Ti-Han.**



cartoonist Enki Bilal) as pure comic strip. One reason advanced for this unforeseen uniformity was the soundtrack score. The film, I omitted to mention, is intermittently a musical, its enchanting *Singspiel* belonging somewhere between Jacques Demy and Kurt Weill. But, for a more satisfying explanation, it might perhaps be worth reflecting an instant on the singular nature of the whole project.

Architectural follies are seldom founded on a sole organisational principle. They are, instead, monumental doodles in stone, lurid encrustations of frostwork and filigree, superbly indifferent to the dictates not only of utility but of aesthetic propriety. And yet, when the final stone has been laid, they nevertheless manage to share with the most serenely classical of Palladian villas and the most staidly respectable of high street building societies a curious, definitive *oneness*. They are what they are, in the end, and nothing else. *La Vie est un Roman* may initially strike one as a crazy patchwork quilt of moods, designs, voices, colours and plots; yet, at least when recollected in tranquillity, it proves, after all, to have had *one* mood, *one* design, etc. And what makes it, for all its flaws, so intoxicating an experience for the spectator is his awareness that Resnais, too, must have had to *discover* his own film, that he must have been just as much in the dark as we are when, for the first time, the lights went down and all *his* hopes were concentrated on the screen. □

***La Vie est un Roman*: the ebullient
Fourierist architect Walter Guarini
(Vittorio Gassman).**



IN SUBSTANCE AS IN STYLE, the credits of Eric Rohmer's films are modesty itself, and we usually pay as scant attention to them as to a publisher's trademark, author's acknowledgments, etc, when opening a book. *Pauline à la Plage* (no problem here—*Pauline at the Beach*) begins in a Garden and ends with Revelations, as Wilde said of the Bible. The third of the cycle 'Comédies et Proverbes', it was filmed, like the others, on a tight budget, with mostly unfamiliar performers, and what plot there is is generated by a misunderstanding—in this instance, one of perception. Not so idly glancing up at the bedroom window of Henry's rented villa, Pierre (Pascal Greggory) happens to spot Louisette (Rosette), this much is certain, romping naked on the bed. But was it with Sylvain (Simon de la Brosse) that she was romping, in which case Pauline (Amanda Langlet) will be consumed by jealousy, or was it with Henry himself (Féodor Atkine), in which case it is Marion (Arielle Dombasle) who will be consumed by jealousy? Naturally, to complete the circle, Pierre, in love with Marion, is already consumed by jealousy.

Though the tone (not to mention the slightly precious verbal idiom) of the film derives from Marivaux, its narrative structure, *dixit* Rohmer himself in an

interview, is a frivolous variation on the old Racinian daisy-chain of *A loves B, B loves C, C loves D, D loves E and E loves A*. In short, *La Ronde*—except that, here, the dark, submerged contagion infecting the six characters is not gonorrhea but logorrhea. Which is not intended as a smart-alecky swipe at the characteristic prolixity of Rohmer's screenplays: the proverbial tag attached to this comedy, from Chrétien de Troyes, is 'Qui trop parole se mesfait', or, literally, 'He who talks too much does himself a disservice.' Rohmer's protagonists must be the talkiest in film history, and this latest set is no exception.

Consider an early scene in Henry's villa. Henry, good-looking, well-preserved and saturnine, a fortyish male of a type that women are said to 'find attractive', proposes love as the theme of an after-dinner conversation. He himself, an affectionate parent and an honourably discharged ex-husband, desires only the transient gratification of a casual affair; Marion, just divorced, aches to 'burn with passion', as she improbably puts it; Pierre, devouring Marion with mooncalf eyes, will be content with nothing less than a solid, durable relationship, one probably implying marriage; and the fifteen-year-old Pauline, Marion's cousin, prefers to reserve judgment.

Each having laid his or her cards on the table, it would appear pointless actually to play the game. They do so, however; and, as you might well predict, Pierre will spend the rest of the film mooning soulfully three paces behind Marion, who will burn with passion for Henry, who will engage in a brief flirtation with Louisette, a vulgar but sexy popcorn vendor, who, causing the only wrinkle in the Racinian scheme, will *apparently* be caught seducing the adolescent Sylvain, who will thereby incur the cool contempt of Pauline. And that's it. That's all there is. Though beautifully photographed by Nestor Almendros (who pinpoints the time of day with such exactitude you could set your watch by it), the beach of the title, at Granville in Normandy, is barely sketched in. The two villas, Henry's and Marion's, are well nigh interchangeable. And not even the ambiguous apparition at Henry's bedroom window can inject any real suspense into the narrative, since we, the audience, know all the time who was with Louisette. Were it not for its absolute perfection, perfection of playing, writing and psychological observation, *Pauline à la Plage* would be devoid of interest.

Perfection, though out of fashion these days, is a fine thing in its way, but it is not a terribly interesting critical concept.

So, rather than review the film at greater length (why bother?), I should like to propose, ever so gingerishly, a theory that might account for the peculiar fascination of Rohmer's work overall. He is, I suggest (with the same rakish impertinence as Rohmer himself suggesting, two decades ago, that Hitchcock was a liar), an adroit and subtle... practical joker. I find something disturbing about these 'Comédies et Proverbes' or, more precisely, about the nature of their current reputation both in and outside their country of origin. Rohmer's admirers have seldom been tongue-tied when it comes to articulating their enthusiasm for his films. Listen to the chorus of satisfied customers surfacing from, say, Academy 1: 'Such a *civilised* director...' and 'Such *intelligent* characters...' and, especially, 'What a pleasure to hear such *good talk* in the cinema...'

Nevertheless, aside from the fact that equating a film's intelligence with the intelligence of its spoken dialogue is to beg a number of crucial questions, I would suggest that not only are Rohmer's characters among the most foolish, ineffectual and pathetic milquetoasts ever to have graced a screen, but that, by a generous estimate, fully ninety per cent of the famous talk is sheer, unadulterated twaddle. To the degree that I am capable of recalling any line of dialogue whatever from his films (excepting, no doubt, *Die Marquise von O...* and *Perceval*), I would be hard pressed to quote a single specimen of genuine intelligence or wit. Rohmer's ploy is a bit like the poetess Anna de Noailles—when sashaying across a packed and glittering *salon*, she would startle her companions by suddenly uttering gibberish, the kind of gibberish calculated to sound, from a distance, like a string of gracious, pearly epigrams. (Note, there is no dishonesty in this: in the cinema, it goes under the name of suspension of disbelief.)

Rohmer's mastery in the handling of such a cynical stratagem is twofold. As an example of his first tactic, let us return to the sextet of *Pauline à la Plage*. I have already described Henry and Louise; of the two adolescents, Pauline is a pretty, just post-pubertal nymphet with underdeveloped breasts, Sylvain dittoish (by which I mean, whatever is the masculine of 'nymphet'); Pierre is one of those sleekly intense young Frenchmen with not an ounce of fat on their bodies nor shred of muscle in their brains; and, as incarnated by Arielle Dombasle (Béatrice Romand's *confidante* in *Le Beau Mariage*), Marion's every appearance in a voluptuous one-piece swimsuit is liable to induce a Tex Avery-like distension of the eyeballs. Though SIGHT AND SOUND critics are not normally expected to detail the physical attributes of a film's cast, in this case it is necessary (and makes a nice change). These are millionaires of beauty, dandies of nudity, gold medallists in self-assurance, poise and exquisite manners.

Lulled into an envious contemplation of their sexual and material superiority, we tend to disregard the extent to which



Pauline à la Plage: Pauline (Amanda Langlet).

they have been self-deluding losers (until brought up sharply by the film's denouement, in which Pauline's refusal to speak out argues, as did *La Vie est un Roman*, that wisdom is maybe a virtue lost, not gained, with adulthood). Which is where Rohmer's use of language comes into play. So brilliantly does he jangle the small change of wit that, just as his characters are persuaded they are making clever remarks, so most spectators will be persuaded they are hearing them. He has an extraordinary gift for pastiching the lapidary speech patterns of classical

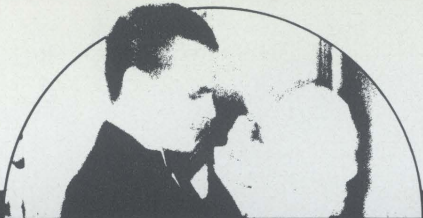
French comedy, with a particular affection for that '... nothing but ...' formula to which the more disillusioned of eighteenth century aphorists were so addicted. For example, 'Women are nothing but the ...' or 'Sexual attraction is nothing but the ...' Needless to say, it scarcely matters what tailpiece you attach: the would-be *culturati* are already nodding in worldly acquiescence. And, somewhere out there, I suspect Rohmer is chuckling over how limpidly the vanity of the world onscreen is mirrored by that off. □

Marion (Arielle Dombasle) and Pierre (Pascal Gregory).



COINCIDENTALLY, sharing its Paris release with *Pauline à la Plage* was yet another film on the ineradicable prestige of childhood. *En rachâchant* is a fictional short directed by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, scripted by Marguerite Duras and shot in bleak black and white by that *Méliès de la lumière*, Henri Alekan. (This title, alas, cannot even be translated into French; but, according to Yann Lardeau in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, it onomatopoeically hints at *harping on*,

harking back, buying back, muttering, mumbling, chewing, knowing, fretting, fuming and murdering!) Though not as funny as, say, *Some Like It Hot*, it is indubitably a comedy, with little Olivier Straub, as handsome and owlish as his parents' films, blowing a gleeful raspberry at the authority of his betters, much as Charles Laughton did in *If I Had a Million*. Its running time is just 7 minutes and 30 seconds. I could have wished for it to last, oh, twice as long. ■



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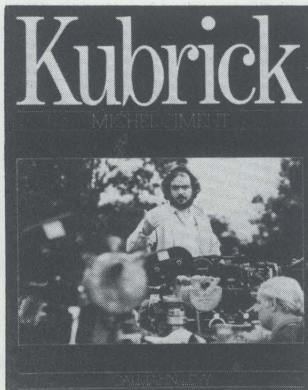
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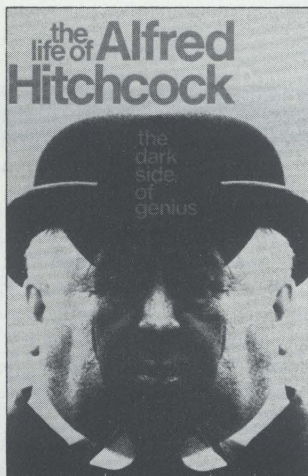
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BARTHES VERSUS CINEMA

Vlada Petric

Admittedly, it was the right time and a wise idea to discuss the late Roland Barthes' attitude towards film (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1982-83). Jonathan Rosenbaum's article 'Barthes and Film' provides, however, a simplified and misleading summary of Barthes' concept of the medium; a summary which fails to mention the extremely subjective hypothesis Barthes formulated about the 'incompleteness' of the motion picture image, and thereby deprives the reader of any real insight into the basic theoretical contradiction that lies at the heart of Barthes' resistance to cinema. Such an omission is a crucial one, not only because it represents a failure on Rosenbaum's part to employ the objectivity and thoroughness characteristic of a legitimate critical inquiry, but also because Barthes' claim that film 'is the very opposite of an hallucination, [that] it is simply an illusion', raises several essential issues of film theory.

Rosenbaum is correct in assuming that Barthes' 'cinophobia' results from his strict semiological-phenomenological approach to art in general, yet it seems superficial to claim that Barthes' textual analysis of the film's narrative structure is 'less useful' than his 'more poetic and suggestive (if less systematic) writings'. Although Barthes' poetic contemplations of the medium are more easily accessible to the general audience, his semiological examination of specific sequences—even when it is compounded by unsubstantiated anti-cinematic conclusions—is far more pertinent to film theory. To characterise, as Rosenbaum does, the complex and dialectical contradiction of Barthes' definition of the nature of cinema as a 'lover's quarrel, a lover's discourse' is unfair both to Barthes' work and to those 'certain academics' who try to explore

particular aspects of Barthes' thought that may, indeed, contribute to the advancement of contemporary theory.

Because he lacked a specific understanding of the elements of the film medium, Barthes developed his concept of the 'nature of cinema' exclusively in relation to photography, a medium he considered superior to cinema on the phenomenological level. In his search for the 'totality of the image', Barthes arrived at the conclusion that while 'the photographic image is full, crammed . . . nothing can be added to it', the cinematic image, 'whose raw material is photographic . . . does not have this completeness.' In his book *Camera Obscura—Reflections on Photography* (1980), Barthes elaborates his view straightforwardly. He postulates that 'the photograph taken in flux [i.e., cinema] is impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views: in cinema the Referent does not protest its former existence: it does not cling to me, it is not spectre.' By spectre, Barthes implies something that does not belong to the real world, a fact which contributes to his negative feeling about cinema, which creates an illusion that is—phenomenologically—very close to the perception of reality: 'The filmic world is sustained by the presumption that—as Husserl says—the experience will constantly continue to flow by in the same "constitutive style"; but the Photograph breaks the "constitutive style" (this is its astonishment); it is *without future* (this is its pathos, its melancholy).' His approach to cinema is both a problematic and an inappropriate one—he theorises about those features of the motion picture image which are 'missing'

and inessential to the medium, while at the same time he avoids addressing features intrinsic to cinema, properties which make it 'melancholic' in its own, dynamic way.

Since the fluctuating nature of the film image can be neither understood nor appreciated by mere comparison to the mortifying nature of the still photograph, one has to make a clear distinction between the *static* and *dynamic* perception of an image and then proceed with a complete theoretical examination of each phenomenon on its own terms. Barthes does not want to go into such a comparative analysis; instead, he poses a direct—and essentially Bazinian—question. He asks 'What is Cinema, then?' and replies by saying that 'it is simply "normal" [and] "lifelike".' He bases this generalisation once again on the motionlessness of photography, a medium which 'flows back from presentation to retention'. But since the essence of cinema is its ability to discharge movement, it subverts the illusion of reality in a totally different manner. Barthes also claims that cinema lacks pensiveness, that it is in no way melancholic, and that it has no *punctum* (a hidden, often unintentional, yet highly revealing detail in the photograph). Barthes concludes that in cinema, 'nothing can be added to the image, I do not have time: in front of the screen I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image, hence I am a host of other qualities, but not pensiveness.'

Here Barthes places himself in direct conflict with Eisenstein's theory of intellectual montage, the ultimate goal of which is to engage the viewer in such a way that he contemplates the presented event during but especially after the screening. Eisenstein's overlapping

montage in the 'Coronation Sequence' of *Ivan the Terrible* is meant to provide the viewer with an opportunity to focus perceptually on a specific visual detail, in much the same way that Dziga Vertov's freeze-frames encourage viewers to search for a *punctum* on the screen and to experience true melancholy when watching the authentic newsreel footage of past events included among the more recently shot sequences.

This lack of pensiveness also inspires Barthes' claim that the *pose* (i.e., a motionless instant of the referent captured by the photo-camera) in cinema is 'swept away and denied by the continuous series of images' which consequently 'deteriorates the *noema* [or essence] of photography'. But if the essence of photography is 'the stasis of arrest', the essence of cinema is dynamism of movement (i.e., kinaesthesia) which—unlike photography, a medium that constantly refers to the past—creates the illusion of presentness. Hence, while Barthes claims that the 'photographic tense is aorist', or in other words, an action which lasted for a certain period of time in the past, the cinematic tense is always 'present continuous', and as such it enhances the viewer's identification with the event shown on the screen. In contrast, photography intensifies the spectator's alienation from the referent, because as Barthes says, 'what I see has been here and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred.' If this is the central paradox of photography, it is only part of a more complex paradox of cinema, which implies that something is not only there but that it is brought back to life.

Whenever Barthes refers to cinema, he analyses its separate frames—what he calls 'photogrammes'—and applies to them principles relevant to still photographs. He takes literally Godard's adage that film is 'truth' which consists of the inexorable flow of twenty-four images projected on the screen each second. This statement, however, is only partially 'true', because twenty-four motionless frames are projected on the screen in such a way that they do not succeed one another continuously but are consistently interrupted by an equal number of black phases. This means that even a film like Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962–64), composed of a series of still photographs and freeze-frames, has a perceptually different impact on the viewer from still photographs or projected slides, because the textures of the projected freeze-frames actually *do move* on the screen.

'Cinematic nostalgia': Ernie Gehr's *Eureka*.

In addition, cinematographic projection produces the so-called stroboscopic effect, in which the subliminal impact of the black phases generates a hypnotic or hypnagogic impact on the viewers. From this stems the 'magic' nature of cinema, its oneiric 'air', which is different from the photographic 'air', one that Barthes finds unanalysable. Eisenstein points to the hypnotic nature of cinema in many of his essays, and some of his most original montage principles derive from the stroboscopic and flickering effect of cinematographic projection. If, according to Barthes, 'photography is literary emanation of the Referent', cinema is literary emanation of the life's dynamism in which the referent plays only a part.

As for the melancholic and nostalgic impact of cinema, as well as its relation to death—a relation Barthes attributes primarily to 'the Photograph', in which, as he says, 'we enter into a *flat Death*'—some of the most avant-garde filmmakers are now demonstrating that cinema can be equally nostalgic, melancholic and contemplative. For example, take Ernie Gehr's film *Eureka* (1979/80), which is an extended variation of 1903 newsreel footage of Market Street in San Francisco, shot in the form of a long take from a moving streetcar. By extending the physical length of the particular shots, which he accomplished by reprinting the frames many times, Gehr achieved a magical optical effect, one quite different from that of slow motion or freeze-frame; the movement of the traffic and pedestrians became arrested from moment to moment, thereby generating a unique perceptual sensation of an image which seemed to be both 'lifelike' and 'dead'. Consequently, the viewer of Gehr's film is given the option of contemplating both the past existence of the event (what Barthes would call 'That-Has-Been') and its 'resurrection' (or what Barthes would call 'There-It-Is').

Perceptually, Gehr's film reveals how the essence or *noema* of the cinematic *pose* opposes the notion of the photographic *pose*, in which 'the arrest of the Referent that has posed in front of the tiny hole has remained there forever.' Barthes infers that in cinema, 'the Referent has passed in front of the same tiny hole ... which is different phenomenology.' Gehr confirms that fact but also proves that the difference is not only in the 'denial of the photographic pose', but more importantly in a dialectical amalgamation of 'something that has posed' and 'something that has passed' in front of the lens; in other words, the periodically extended temporal duration of certain shots reminds the viewer that the photographic image plays an integral part in the cinematic projection, and serves to make the film self-referential and also enhances the viewer's alienation from the event-referent. Bearing in mind that Barthes admittedly did not attend the movies very often, it would be most interesting to know how he would have reacted to Gehr's film.

Incapable of transcending his innate semiological frame of mind, Barthes con-

siders the extra-cinematic features which have invaded the narrative film to be specific to cinema. He is not, or does not want to be, aware of the fact that acting or *mise en scène*, for example—regardless of their adaptation to the medium—are essentially theatrical elements, elements whose presence in narrative cinema leads him to make another erroneous statement concerning point of view in photography and cinema. For Barthes, 'the photograph has the power of the frontal pose, of looking straight in the eye.' He adds that 'Here, moreover, is another difference: in film no one ever looks at me', for it is 'forbidden by the Fiction.' From this statement one assumes that Barthes must have watched only the most orthodox narrative films, and was thus unacquainted with *cinéma-vérité* films (often shot in the form of a series of interviews) or with those contemporary narrative films in which the convention of the third person's viewpoint has been violated or abandoned.

In his autobiography, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975), he explains his resistance to cinema in the following way: 'In film the signifier itself is always by nature continuous, whatever the rhetoric of frame and shot; without remission, a continuum of images; the film (our French word for it, *Pellicule*, is highly appropriate: a skin without puncture or perforation) follows, like a garrulous ribbon, statutory impossibility of the fragment, of a haiku.' Obviously his semiological frame of mind prohibits him from considering any signifier which is not permanently fixed; for Barthes, if the index is not static it can't be contemplated as an 'authentication of the past'. And since the fluctuating dynamism of cinema did not permit such a stationary contemplation, Barthes declined to explore other more dynamic avenues. Instead, he adopted the kind of static contemplation he employed in his interpretation of photography and imposed it on cinema.

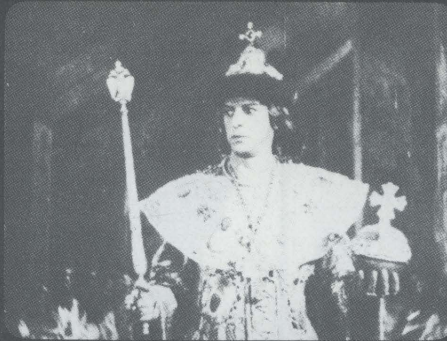
With this attitude in mind, he singled out several frames from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1942–46/58) and analysed them as *non-continuous*, *flowless* units, as specifically photographed slides. This approach is indicative of Barthes' entire attitude to cinema: his analytical method clearly reveals an incapacity—or unwillingness—to examine films on their own terms. He dedicated an entire essay, 'The Third Meaning: Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills', to the extra-cinematic aspects of the 'Coronation Sequence', a short segment composed of fifteen shots structured on a particular montage principle. Barthes' analysis takes into account sets, costumes, characters, their relationships and their appearance in the anecdote (what he calls the 'informative level, or the level of communication'), the imperial ritual of baptism by gold (the 'symbolic level'), and the courtiers' make-up (the 'level of an evident, erratic and persistent meaning'). The two former levels (informative and symbolic) according to Barthes represent *significance*, while the third level (evident and persistent meaning) represents the



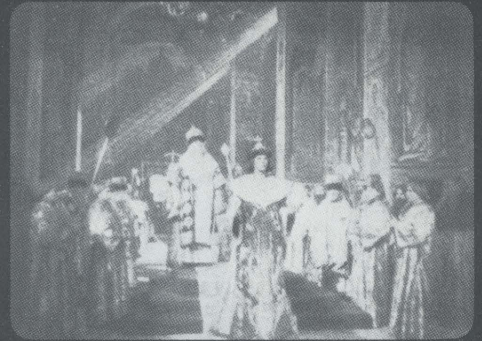
Detail: The primacy of the object (the crown).



Straight view: Symbols of the Tsar's power.



Total view: A spectacular environment.



Ivan the Terrible: Preparation for the ritual, mise en scène (above); the Shower of Gold, overlapping montage (below).

signifier. This classification, however, does not address the elements unique to the film medium. Sets, costumes, characters, spectacular ritual (*mise en scène*) and make-up—all these are, in actuality, theatrical signifiers, not cinematic ones. 'The stupid nose of the one [referring to a courtier], and the delicate line of the eyelids on the other, his dull blond hair, his wan complexion,' are, as Barthes describes it, signifiers but only within the thematic-narrative-dramatic context of the photographed event; however, these same signifiers inevitably become *signifieds* in the process of the cinematic execution and film projection. If these narrative-dramatic signifiers produce what Barthes calls an excess of meaning, it is certainly not the cinematic excess which Eisenstein calls overtones and which is generated by specific cinematic devices, especially montage. Similarly, the repulsiveness of the character Euphrosinia—the 'ugly dullness of her skin' as seen on the still—is a photographic rendition that acquires a completely different impact and meaning when projected on the movie screen. Barthes does not go into this area of analysis, nor does he want to trespass on the limits still photography imposes on him and that he imposes on cinema.

It is impossible to discuss the real cinematic signification of the 'Coronation Sequence' without examining its formal properties—camera angle, lighting, dynamic shot composition, camera movement, image scale, depth of field and montage—all elements to which Barthes does not pay attention. For example, he points to the extraordinary symbolism of this sequence of stills, describing it as 'the shower of gold', and 'the curtain constituted by this shower, or disfiguration it effects', but never mentions that

this symbolism is seen fully only when shots are projected on the screen. Given his strictly thematic concern, Barthes fails to recognise that the 'golden curtain' (a phenomenon he obviously experienced while watching the film in a movie theatre), is erected by specific cinematic signifiers—in this case overlapping montage—capable of extending temporal duration of the actual act of pouring ducats over the Tsar's head.

Only close cinematic analysis reveals that Eisenstein achieved the illusion of the shower of gold by repeating the concluding parts of the same shot *eight times* (taking care each time to reduce the duration of the repeated segment by several frames) and by also intercutting five medium shots of the attending boyars to create the metaphor of 'splendour and plenitude' surrounding the young Tsar. Apparently it is the specific choice of angle, high contrast, lens distortion (or disfiguration) and the flickering effect that provide the optical glittering, a type of sun fire burning below the Tsar's feet. Moreover, it is the montage structure—not the theatrical elements he singles out—that accounts for the cinematic symbolism Barthes refers to. If these specific cinematic signifiers are overlooked, analysis of the sequence is incomplete, and the subsequent interpretation—no matter how inventive it may be—does not correspond to the viewer's actual experience when watching the film.

It is in the fixedness of the photograph that Barthes recognises its hallucinatory impact, which he claims is the source of the 'madness of photography'. This madness does not, Barthes maintains, exist in cinema: 'Photography is mad by nature because it keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it, while Cinema is never mad by nature: it is the

opposite of hallucination, it is simply an illusion, its vision is oneiric, not ecmenic.' In this madness of photography—which 'obliges the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time'—Barthes located what he calls photographic ecstasy. So immersed was he in this ecstasy that he felt incapable of making the search for another, cinematic ecstasy, let alone specifying its unique properties. Yet even though he rejected cinema, and although he felt it lacked the specificities he recognised in photography, Barthes' theories bring to the surface some unresolved issues of film theory.

Barthes' cinephobia stems from the basic problem of the semiological approach to cinema; namely, that it concerns itself exclusively with the thematic/narrative aspect of the film and undertakes to study a film's 'text' rather than the complex *cinematic* elements that distinguish the medium. Most semiological analyses examine only the script, and yet semiologists often describe their interpretation as an analysis of the projected film. Barthes himself isolated only certain components of the cinematic structure—several *photogrammes*—and interpreted them in terms of their photographic properties; unfortunately, he never considered their most important property: their kinaesthetic integration with the other aspects of the cinematic structure. However, some of his statements are useful, especially in their phenomenological precision, as a starting point for a cinematic analysis of Eisenstein's sequence. But his insights, if they are to be truly useful, must be applied to the specific properties of the medium. Only then will Barthes' contribution—not resistance—to film theory become apparent. ■



Indication of the space outside the frame (to the right).



Centre: The focus of the space and action (the Tsar's head).



Indication of the space outside the frame (to the left).



Author's lunch: James (Jonathan Pryce) and his publisher (David De Keyser).

How we are, how we were

The Ploughman's Lunch and *Ill Fares the Land*

John Pym

The 'Ploughman's Lunch' was an adman's dream. No haywain ever unwrapped a pat of EEC butter or cut a slice of pasteurised brie. But the lunch made everyone happy: the City businessman could imagine himself in the Cotswolds; the harried barmaid could dispense with the microwave oven. A director of TV commercials, Matthew (plausible, unruffled Frank Finlay), recounts this anecdote—carefully placed and tellingly appropriate, like much else in *The Ploughman's Lunch* (Virgin)—to a less world wise radio news editor, James (Jonathan Pryce). Matthew, under a misapprehension, has summoned the bemused James to give his blessing to what he takes to be the latter's intention to have an affair with his wife. James is really after the daughter.

Hampstead values prevail in the newer media world of *The Ploughman's Lunch* (produced by Goldcrest and Michael White, written by Ian McEwan and directed by Richard Eyre): news is orchestrated, wearily, frenetically, professionally; books, books as packages, are concocted by those in the right places; people of position seem, invariably, to have arrived at a happy accommodation—the commercials director, for instance, will prostitute his skills for money, and encourage his wife (Rosemary Harris), a socialist historian, in her affairs for his peace of mind. It is the way the wheels turn.

Matters are not so ordered on the St Kilda of Bill Bryden's *Ill Fares the Land* (Channel 4). Had she a mind to it, the socialist historian might have written an elegant monograph on the fate of this

isolated 'utopian' community, its members fused together, doomed, through force of circumstance on a barren, beautiful island in the inhospitable Atlantic some hundred miles off the West of Scotland. The history of St Kilda, however, has a tragic plainness; the anecdote of the ploughman's lunch, a metropolitan archness. The St Kilda community broke up in 1930: the four families which remained could no longer support themselves, the outside world, the tourist trade, with its diseases was encroaching, the only half-believed illusion of a more secure future beckoned from the mainland.

The Ploughman's Lunch, which follows James, a working-class boy now in his thirties with ambition and expensive tastes, as he pursues the privileged, unattainable Susan (Charlie Dore), and *Ill Fares the Land*, which follows a community as it acknowledges, painfully, that it must extricate itself from the past, are both, in their different ways, reports on what we have made of ourselves. British films, concerned with very particular individual and quirky corners of the nation, not afraid of larger statements, and both executed with confident fluency. It is as if the film-makers know, and can communicate the feeling, that what they have to say will be of interest to the wide world.

Ian McEwan's London is observed through and highlighted by a series of skilfully juxtaposed and often drily amusing vignettes: knowing, certainly, but not overwhelmingly so; we are not excluded from the proceedings. Mediaman, Young Poet, Historywoman,

Publisher are all mocked with barbed elegance. It is not exactly that they all have their reasons, though some of them do; but rather that, with a gesture, a few words of dialogue, they are given a history outside the plot. We have not, perhaps, been given a more accurate portrait of a certain section of London life since *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*. And the achievement of *The Ploughman's Lunch*, photographed by Clive Tickner with a distinctive up-to-the-minute clarity, is that we come away convinced. Yes, this is the Tory conference as seen from the floor (and the film marries actuality and fiction with ease), how a BBC news conference works, how a radio news bulletin is actually delivered; this is how gossip columnists effortlessly ply their trade (and Tim Curry, as James' go-between, is a charming modern example of a coffee-house dandy). The film induces a bracing shock of recognition.

Bill Bryden's approach is slow, cumulative; Richard Eyre's lightning. Compare, for example, the two men's recent work at the National Theatre: Eyre's vivid, whole-stage recreation of Runyon's tricksters in *Guys and Dolls*; Bryden's enclosed celebration of worlds threatened with dissolution unless mended by love, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bryden draws us by degrees into the life of St Kilda until we become accustomed and sympathetic to its rhythms and inescapably aware of its terminal decline. Eyre and McEwan invite us to observe the caperings of mankind, another sort of struggle for survival, the ironic compromises those on top of the heap are compelled to make, the vanity of human wishes and, eventually, for their story has a political sting in its tail, how the working-class boy is still liable to be passed over in this ill-fated declining land of buried class distinctions.

Both films deal with an economically depressed nation: there is no work on St Kilda, but the unspoken fear is that there will in the long run be just as little on the Scottish mainland; the characters in *The Ploughman's Lunch* have escaped the privations of unemployment, but its shadow hovers in the background, along with other signs of national distress, the Peace Women, the Falklands War, the unregarded bread-and-butter of James' profession. The St Kildans' succumb; James and his fellows, who on the whole lack the St Kildans' sense of community, have learned to fend for themselves (or have inherited enough money to ease the passage), to deny their origins and their beliefs for present comforts and momentary achievements.

In London, 80s London, where some people actually appear better off than they did ten years ago (or perhaps just more willing to spend their money), if you are not consuming your ploughman's lunch, you may—in McEwan's world—be tucking into an elaborate meal: like the greedy publisher, to whom James successfully sells a popular book on Suez,

seen considering the pudding trolley without a moment's guilty hesitation. On St Kilda, fifty years earlier, where puffins and fulmars are the staple, not to say the only diet, you had first to catch your bird. And this was a communal art. In London, the individual art is fencing your way through the first two courses and clinching the deal—whatever it is—over the strawberries and cream.

The Ploughman's Lunch and *Ill Fares the Land*, first features directed by men better known for their work in the theatre, are proof—though there have

been earlier signs—that movies, British movies, can indeed be made for both television and the cinema. The significant fact, perhaps, is that neither seems overblown on the large screen, or restricted on the small. Some sort of balance has been reached, and we shall no doubt see more of this in the future. Another notable fact is that both films have found their internal scale: they are both 'small' films, but by no means minor ones. They ask to be taken seriously, and the tone in which they ask seems right for the times. □



Cam Ramsay (Jessie Walker Stewart) and Mrs Ramsay (Rosemary Harris).

'Soft and pliable, and I think deep'

To the Lighthouse/Richard Mayne

'This is going to be fairly short,' Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary on 14 May 1925. 'To have father's character done complete in it; and mother's; and St Ives; and childhood; and all the usual things I try to put in—life, death, etc. But the centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting *We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel*.' Three weeks later, *To the Lighthouse* still unstirred, she was having doubts. 'But this theme may be sentimental; father and mother and child in the garden; the death; the sail to the Lighthouse. I think, though, that when I begin it I shall enrich it in all sorts of ways; thicken it; give it branches—roots which I do not perceive now.' By 21 March 1927, the book finished, she was frankly pleased with it. 'Soft and pliable, and I think deep, and never a word wrong for a page at a time. This I feel about the dinner party and the children in the boat; but not of Lily on the lawn. That I do not much like. But I like the end.'

Posterity—or what there's been of it so far—has endorsed that verdict. E. M. Forster thought *The Waves* Virginia Woolf's greatest book, but confessed that *To the Lighthouse* was his favourite. Of all her novels—she sought, but never

found, a better name for them—this was the most accessible. *Pace* Forster's misgivings about 'plot', it told a story. 'I can make up situations,' she wrote shortly afterwards, 'but I cannot make up plots.' Yet *To the Lighthouse* tackled 'this impersonal thing, which I'm dared to do by my friends, the flight of time.' In three sections, it chronicled the life of a family shrunk by war and death. Part I, 'The Window', was suffused with light and warmth: the glow of holidays or paradise, the guiding presence of Mrs Ramsay, mothering even her husband, kind, cantankerous, dissatisfied with his own work. Some day, tomorrow if it's fine, the family will sail to the lighthouse... but they never do. 'Time Passes'—the title of Part II. Mrs Ramsay dies; so does her daughter Prue; so, in the Great War, does one of her sons. In Part III, 'The Lighthouse', the survivors return to the run-down house by the sea. At last, Mr Ramsay takes them on their long-postponed excursion. But things have changed. The children have grown up; the lighthouse is 'stark and straight', 'barred with black and white': it has windows, and washing spread to dry. Is it no longer the vision it once seemed—a silvery misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened

suddenly and softly in the evening'? Must all such visions fade? 'No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing,' Lily Briscoe, the family's friend who has watched them throughout with her painter's eye, at last completes her canvas, her picture of the house as it was or once had been. 'Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.'

Brooding, remembering, regretting, finally consoling life with art, *To the Lighthouse* seems at first sight impossible to film. Action? The small epiphanies of family life, interrupted by offstage drama. Dialogue? Almost absent from long stretches of the text. Characters? Ah, yes: but revealed by their thoughts, their interior monologues. To adapt such a book to the cinema or the small screen needs creative imagination as well as tact.

Hugh Stoddart's screenplay brims with both. Purists may wonder at some episodes, such as the Cornish wrestling, which seems more appropriate to D. H. Lawrence than to Virginia Woolf. But even this illuminates pointers in the text, filling out Mr Ramsay's easy way with the locals. Some of the philosophical dialogue smacks of pseudo-Bloomsbury: but so, no doubt, did Bloomsbury itself. And if Mr Ramsay's student, called in the book 'the atheist Tansley', has become more political than heterodox, this too has its textual basis: 'My father is a chemist, Mrs Ramsay. He keeps a shop.' This, we have to remember, was still the world which E. M. Forster's 'Leonard Bast' found so forbidding.

So the film's text is fair to the novel. The location has done it proud. Instead of Skye, the novel's fictitious setting, the director Colin Gregg has used Cornwall, the real scene of Virginia Woolf's childhood holidays. The house owned by her father Leslie Stephen was at St Ives; it had a view of the Godrevy Lighthouse. For the film, Colin Gregg found a farmhouse with just the right qualities: roomy, but not stately; rickety enough for the bleak 'Time Passes' sequence when the wind roams through its neglected passageways; set amid greenery; not too far from the salt air of the sea.

The cast fit their surroundings. Rosemary Harris incarnates Mrs Ramsay, so convincingly as to eclipse earlier imaginings: without a doubt she's the Queen Bee, as Lawrence called Frieda—a reposeful presence, full of resource and capability, but alive with small impatience, annoyance, self-questioning, able to argue with Lily Briscoe on her own terms. As Mr Ramsay, Michael Gough gives a fine, intelligent performance. As a father, as a lecturer, he convinces; yet he still seems a performer, not quite the Mr Ramsay/Leslie Stephen we meet in the book. The revelation in the casting is Suzanne Bertish as Lily Briscoe, sounding like Janet Suzman, but seeming as much of the 20s as Katherine Mansfield—a strong, lonely, perhaps disappointed New Woman, angry with

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society's assumptions but wedded to her art. Artists, and especially painters, have often fared badly in the cinema, speaking impossible lines, wielding a dry brush on implausible pictures. Suzanne Bertish avoids these pitfalls. Even her paintings, by Mali Morris, might have interested Roger Fry. 'There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought: it would be destroyed.' Very probably. But one of the points *To the Lighthouse* was making was that in the end the picture's fate was immaterial.

What will be the fate of Colin Gregg's far more distinguished picture? Made on

film, and screened on BBC2, it deserves theatrical distribution; but even a television audience may find it slow. Like a good silent movie, it demands the quality of attention reserved for poetry: its effect is subtle, its appeal stealthy, its resonance prolonged. I'm not quite sure that anyone seeing it without having read the novel will have experienced all that Virginia Woolf managed to communicate. It's easy to be seduced by light. In this film, it plays round the characters and their setting as the novel's prose does: but there's something insubstantial about even the family meal which so impressed E. M. Forster with its 'real food', the succulent *boeuf en daube*. Virginia Woolf

put it in, he said, 'because she tasted it.' On film, we have no sense of taste or smell. To that extent, Colin Gregg has perforce confirmed Virginia Woolf's reputation as an 'ethereal' writer. She was certainly no Dickens or Arnold Bennett: but her work was solid nonetheless. 'What I feel,' she wrote of *To the Lighthouse*, 'is that it is a hard muscular book.' Colin Gregg's film is rather less so. Still, 'soft and pliable, and I think deep', it remains the best literary adaptation for the screen since the Merchant-Ivory production of *The Europeans*. It's also, incidentally, just as ravishing to look at. In a medium which can produce *The Class of 1984*, that can't be bad. □



'Passion': Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert) and Jerzy (Jerzy Radziwilowicz).

Film for Video

Passion/Richard Combs

'I'm fed up with a production that produces nothing.' It's a sentiment very much in the air in *Passion* (Artificial Eye), and voiced as it happens not by one of film director Jerzy's bewildered backers but by a production assistant, who flounces off while the director himself toys with one of his art history *tableaux*, making an Esther Williams 'star' out of Ingres' 'small bather'. Work satisfaction might be said to be the issue if not the theme of *Passion*—though in a peculiarly (Godardian) roundabout fashion, even when it takes in the politics and economics of the workplace (parallel to the problems in Jerzy's film, there is a labour dispute in a local factory, from which he has drawn girls to appear as some of his statuesque nude extras). What Godard appears to be worrying at is whether there should be any 'issue' in another sense, any 'product' to work at all, or whether, as the factory girls formulate their position, 'One should work to love or love to work.' The aphorism elides the two verbs so smoothly that any

sense of progression or purpose about the connective 'to' is lost—unless passion is the only purpose.

We don't in the end know any more about what comes out of the factory than we do about what is supposed to come out of Jerzy's movie. Sausages were definitely the product in *Tout va bien*—which also involved a factory dispute in which the boss was locked in while here he is (nearly) locked out. *Tout va bien*, in fact, might be taken as an earlier instance of what Godard is attempting here. In both cases, present struggles involve a reassessment of past work: *Tout va bien* drew some explicit political lessons for the ciné-aesthete and former Nouvelle Vague-ist who had opted out of any corresponding commitment in the 70s; *Passion* keeps turning the same political lessons into declamations about art, love and cinema, as if what was needed for the 80s was a constant recycling and resynthesising of experience.

This could be taken as a sign that Godard is becoming more like his pre-68

self—of which there are other signs, like some pop-art juxtapositions of colour and insouciant choreography during all the busy coming and going, the frequent tangling of limbs that marks the more frenetic discussions of love and cinema. But what comes between cinéaste Godard and political Godard is precisely the Godard who has declared himself interested in what comes 'in between', the flux of images on video and television as opposed to the succession of images in cinema, where what comes before and after determines how we receive the statement that is being made now. Where the 'product' is just more work put in.

It is one of the perversities of *Passion* that it approaches definitions of cinema (and of artistic creativity in general) with an implicit video mentality. Jerzy (Jerzy Radziwilowicz) is harassed by the assumption of everyone—from potential backers to his co-workers to his girlfriend—that the film he is making must contain some pre-existing story. Godardian aphorisms of course abound to refute the merchants of story-cinema with the notion that cinema, like life, makes itself up as it goes along. 'You have to live stories before you can invent them. Before the sentence is found you can begin to speak, to live.' But Jerzy is equally harassed by the problem of realising the 'stories' he sees in the material to hand, whether found (a face flickering on a TV screen, about which he comments, 'there are stories and lighting there') or meticulously assembled (the *tableaux vivants* he has based on famous canvases by Rembrandt, Goya, Delacroix, El Greco, and which are all his film, also called *Passion*, seems to contain).

Lighting is the problem—lighting is perhaps the definition of cinema, it is both (in the film's political-aesthetic continuum) the means of production and the means of expression. (Note the factory girls' similar problem with finding the words to address their employer.) A voice-over discussion of Rembrandt's 'The Night Watch' illustrates how its 'story' is the spaces, the areas 'in between', created by its lighting. Jerzy's self-imposed task is to translate that painting of light into painting in light.

And here his frustration becomes intense. Just why the lighting of the *tableaux* never meets his approval is not explained, except by one expostulation as he storms off the set: 'It doesn't go anywhere or come from anywhere.' Does Jerzy want to illuminate art with the kind of 'exterior' lighting that Godard insisted on in shooting his *Passion*, and which led to his being turned down by four cinematographers (Storaro, Aranowicz, Decae and Alekan) before he found his way back to Raoul Coutard: 'I had to make it a condition that they would come outside with me to look and to listen to the light and to record it; I wanted to work with them in finding the space in which the telling of the content becomes possible by starting with a certain light.'

Jerzy never finds the light which would make the telling of his content possible—perhaps less out of technical or artistic inadequacy than because he can never quite reconcile himself to a distinction which he makes early in the piece between a lie and 'something made up'. The latter is saved by its painstaking 'approximations of verisimilitude' but it is still 'separated from the real world'. And Jerzy, like his creator, is at heart not a separate-world cinéaste but a go-between audio-visualist. As he says of his return to the set after one of his frequent threats to quit: 'To come back is the only thing I know how to do.'

There is quite a comedy of coming and going in *Passion*, in fact—knots of struggling people (lovers, money-men, hangers-on) invading or being expelled from the set. The light that comes from somewhere very unartfully illumines one of the factory girls, Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert), as she sits beneath a stark table lamp at their meeting. And even more than its flux of images, the soundtrack of *Passion* is a riot of toing and froing, a war of sound (car horns versus classical music) which, in the old Godard, might have been taken as a strategy of narrative disruption/interruption, but here seems simply to represent other channels of production/expression.

Godard has described Isabelle's stutter, and the strangled coughing of factory owner Michel (Michel Piccoli), as the 'voices' of their respective classes. One system of production also borrows from another when Jerzy's assistants come to the factory looking for 'talent' and take the boss' deaf-mute daughter (what class she?)—a transaction made to feel distinctly like procuring, not surprisingly, given the development of the theme of love and money from *Vivre sa vie* to *Sauve qui peut*. In this transaction, Jerzy can also be made to look like Michel, farcically so when Jerzy (who has suppressed his backers' 'story') receives a knife in the ribs meant for Michel (who has suppressed a creditor's cheque).

In much the same way, the love/work symbiosis, which excludes the baleful necessity of a product, seems less to

describe a Utopia of workers happy at their machines than a kind of behavioural displacement or complicity. Jerzy insists that the gestures of love and work are the same, just in a different tempo; 'I believe ultimately,' says Isabelle, confronting both her employer and the filmmakers with their repression (his of her, theirs of a true picture of people at work), 'that work is the same as pleasure.'

From work as pleasure to creative immobilisation as erotic fixation is but a short step—taken when Jerzy compares the 'in between' that he is trying to explore in his film with his state of being in between an open and a closed woman. Sitting, with his unhappy but sympathetic producer Lazlo (Lazlo Szabo) before a partly opened cyclorama sky, he talks of the heaven and earth they have literally moved in order to find the right opening—a term also translated, with more explicitly sexual meaning, as the 'universal wound'. 'The work you demand of me,' says Hanna (Hanna Schygulla), wife of Michel, owner of the motel in which the film unit is staying, and one of the women referred to by Jerzy, 'is too close to love.'

Whether Jerzy, in his creative thrall, could be described as blocked in the now time-honoured tradition of 8½ is another question. Godard has claimed that *Passion* is not a film about film-making, not another *Contempt* or *Day for Night*—

although all its amorous fussing and feuding, so many tangents away from the work in hand, interestingly complicates the Truffaut picture of private passions feeding into a passion for cinema. What it is most and least like in this respect is *The State of Things*; threat of closure hangs over not just the project in hand (with Lazlo at the end about to follow Wenders' producer on a one-way trip to Hollywood) but over cinema in general, though where Wenders reflects the collapse inward, in the entropy and ennui of a film shoot, Godard scatters it outwards and rhymes it with everything else.

But meeting, perhaps, through Nicholas Ray, both reflect on the cinema as an alternative home, the natural territory of exiles—and both fear the seductive alienation of a home in the West (think of the lighting in California, exhorts Lazlo, trying to persuade Jerzy to come with him, think of von Sternberg and Boris Kaufman). And fairly general threats to quit during the production are translated at the end into a mass exodus in the direction of Poland—a kind of wish-fulfilment solidarity with Jerzy (work as both an alienating and contraband activity of course finds an extra-cinematic metaphor in *Moonlighting*). Jerzy himself heads off in the producer's car, marking another transitional phase of cinema and the possibility of another comeback. □

Through the looking glass

One Man's War/Tom Milne

The fascination of *One Man's War* (Artificial Eye) is the funambulist exercise it offers of trying to maintain a balance while walking a precariously wavering line of truth. Edgardo Cozarinsky's film is surely unique among documentary compilations about France under the Nazi occupation in that, not interested in apportioning praise or blame (or in collecting excuses like *Le Chagrin et la pitié*), it is not primarily concerned with pinpointing the realities of what went on.

Instead it offers two voices in counterpoint, one belonging to a German officer with the occupying forces, the other to French newsreels of the period. The newsreels are instantly suspect, not merely because they are dolls manipulated by the propaganda ventriloquists of Vichy and Nazi Germany, but because they follow the time-honoured principle of trivialising all life into a catchphrase joke or a flood of crocodile tears. But what of the German officer whose diaries, subsequently published as *Les Journaux Parisiens*, lend the film its offscreen commentary?

Ernst Jünger, a disenchanted aristocrat, a man of culture who delights in the wit of Guitry and Cocteau, a writer of sensibility who can convey the raw horror of being required to command an execu-

tion squad and being unable to maintain the correct dispassionate distance. Of his previously published writings, among them an allegory warning against totalitarianism, we learn little; although, since he is military commandant of the army of occupation in Paris, we may be sure that even implied reservations about the Nazi regime must have been couched in terms of discretion.

A civilised observer, then, who drily wonders at the 'necessity' which uproots 600,000 French lives by sending men to work in Germany. Whose complaint that the 'technicians' now conducting the war lack any sense of values or ethics is ironically echoed by newsreel footage of Heydrich preparing to inaugurate the new rationalised methods of extermination. Whose reluctant experience of the Russian front ('These disasters demand a new Goya') leads him to a new appraisal of what Nazism is all about.

One can see Jünger as the archetypal man in the ivory tower, moved to applaud the von Stauffenberg plot to assassinate Hitler, but paralysed himself by the vulgar betrayal of duty and decorum implied in any less aristocratic form of protest. Or, since Jünger's repudiation of the Nazi machine intensifies in direct ratio to its erosion into auto-destruction,

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the ivory tower of his diaries might be seen as a clever construct offering a palliation, even a justification, when *Götterdämmerung* finally comes.

Either way, there is a reality to Jünger just as there is a reality in the newsreels. One is so used to looking for partisans and collaborators (or Eichmanns and Barbies) in these affairs that one hardly notices the truth of Jünger's tourist-eye view of occupied Paris, blithely confirmed by the newsreel images, as a place where life goes on undisturbed, where lovers still walk the streets, where on Bastille Day 1941 a stranger passing in the night can shake a German's hand in friendly complicity. Not entirely undisturbed, of course, since another truth is gradually emerging to erode these images, its seismic tremors not merely recorded but read by Cozarinsky in moments of punctuation like his reiteration of a shot taken at the trial of Bernard Nathan—real life equivalent of the *Jew Süss*

blandly advertised on the cinema posters—in which the latter demands to be left alone by the amused and intrusive newsreel camera.

'This isn't a comedy, it's a tragedy,' Nathan screams, and with the perspective of hindsight one can only agree. But what *One Man's War* pins to its drawing-board, still fluttering and feverishly alive, is the comedy of occupied France before most of the actors realised it was a tragedy. Significantly enough, the most moving moment in the film (discounting the familiar horrors as merely adumbrated by what we see) comes in a speech by Marshal Pétain, vulnerable and dithering, moved almost to tears as he echoes Maurice Chevalier's earlier song ('C'est notre espoir') in begging Frenchmen not to blight his hopes for the future, to abandon futile hatreds, to consider the fate of 'our country' if civil war strikes. Ah, the infinitely sad spectacle of *les hommes de bonne volonté*...



'One Man's War'.

The mechanics of comedy

Tootsie/Nick Roddick

With everything that follows, it is easy to forget the opening shot of *Tootsie* (Columbia-EMI-Warner)—a slow, close-up pan over a dressing-room table littered with make-up, starting with a bottle of stage blood and ending on a mouth having lipstick applied to it. It is an important shot, though, since it establishes, quietly and decisively, that we are dealing with a kind of make-believe. Maybe the fact that we move from the blood (which is fake) to the mouth (being falsified) suggests that we need expect no

real pain for the next two hours. But I doubt it: Sydney Pollack is much too clever a director to burden his comedy with so unequivocally direct a statement. And anyway, *Carny* started with much the same shot, and its ambitions were quite different.

Tootsie is a downbeat fairy tale about the lengths to which it is necessary to go to make it in showbusiness. In desperation, Michael (Dustin Hoffman) dresses as a woman, Dorothy, and becomes the unlikely star of a TV soap opera. Like

most fairy tales, it has its serious themes, but attempts to force its hand on those themes are liable to prove self-defeating. Such attempts have, of course, been made. Channel 4's *Visions* came up trumps with a straight-to-camera statement by a gay man and a gay woman about how the film fails to explore the possibility of meaningful homosexual relationships. Of course it fails: that is not what it is about. On a different beat, it has been berated for not being *Some Like It Hot*. This seems equally unfair: Pollack, unlike Wilder, is not a stylist, but a film-maker whose work has, precisely, been underrated because it is eclectic. He has (unfashionably) told many different stories without any marked signature other than that of a committed professionalism.

With *Tootsie*, he has committed himself to the notion of a comedy, in which the details are drawn from observation (the New York avant-garde theatre scene is portrayed with a self-mocking brilliance that, coming from off-Broadway alumni Pollack and Hoffman, is particularly admirable), but with the basic structure well removed from realism. The backbone of the plot, from the burgeoning friendship between Michael/Dorothy and Julie, the soap-opera beauty, via the marriage proposal to Dorothy from Julie's father, Les, to the final double reconciliation, is straight from a centuries-old stock book. Indeed, the explanation of how she is in fact a man which Dorothy weaves in front of the live cameras—an episode in *Tangier*, a disfiguring disease, a long-lost brother—comes from a tradition that has scarcely seen the light of day since Molière (*The Miser*) and dates back to Plautus (*Menaechmi*).

It is a structure that Pollack and Hoffman manipulate with great skill. Individual scenes, for example the one in which the lecherous middle-aged male lead of



'Tootsie': Dorothy (Dustin Hoffman) and her admirer Les (Charles Durning).

the soap makes a pass at Dorothy only to be interrupted by her/his roommate, are finely orchestrated, combining Neil Simon-esque repartee (Van Horn: 'I'm just an old has-been.' Dorothy: 'Oh, were you ever famous?') with a genuinely cinematic comic flair. And although the film flags a little about two-thirds of the way through with the visit to Les' farm, it is pace—that quality we critics were supposed to fall back on when we had yet to discover authorial signatures—which distinguishes *Tootsie*. Indeed, some of its finest achievements are in the series of small, mute linking scenes—Dorothy getting a cab on her first day as a woman; her rise to fame and magazine covers; Julie and Dorothy riding on Les' tractor—which tie the whole thing together and keep it moving.

Tootsie is an extremely funny movie, which is a pretty weak argument to offer against the suggestion that it presents a caricature of femininity. Sometimes, I envy those of my colleagues who, for reasons of—let's be charitable—space, can simply write 'I laughed and laughed'. But the point about *Tootsie* is that most of its humour comes from a deft handling, by a fine director and an uncharacteristically likeable Dustin Hoffman, of the mechanics of comedy. Obviously, comedy relies on received notions, and the received notion here is that a dowdy middle-aged woman is funny. It is a notion which the film neither exploits—as do, for example, the Pythons—nor questions (as, perhaps, does *A Question of Silence*). It merely uses it, fairly knowingly, but in a way that one has to struggle to find offensive. *La Lutte*, of course, *continue*. A certain amount of the humour does indeed come from tapping reflexes and waiting for the knee-jerks.

Clearly, the enterprise is not above reproach. Teri Garr's Sandy, the neurotic failed actress, is merely a pawn in a game of sexual role play, used emotionally by Michael and cynically by the script-writers. Similarly, the scene in which Dorothy, on her first public outing, camps it up with her agent, a passing producer and a waiter in the Russian Tea Room is only partly excused by the fact that it shows Michael still groping for Dorothy's identity off the *Southwest General* set. Most of all, there is something distinctly disturbing about the notion of a man becoming a feminist champion and advising a woman on how to deal with her intimate problems of identity and role. But something challenging, too: a comedy which draws back from getting its feet wet, as did *Best Friends*, another 'big' Hollywood comedy that dealt with gender roles, is unlikely to make much impact as a comedy. *Best Friends* passed the time pleasantly enough. But *Tootsie* does more. It refuses to keep off the grass, stirring up a good bit of mud in the process, before deftly extricating itself with a fairy-tale flourish of reconciliation—a film more likely to make friends than influence people. □

Boyhood memories

The Courtesans of Bombay/Tom Milne



'The Courtesans of Bombay': in the compound.

Ismail Merchant's *The Courtesans of Bombay* (Enterprise) both is and is not a documentary about Pavan Pool, the vast tenement block in Bombay which serves as a kind of voluntary jail for 4,000 people. A casually candid camera picks out details illustrating the topsy-turvy nature of this society where families living ten or twelve to a room spill out on to verandahs and courtyards, where men are drones and the women, all courtesans past, present and future, act both as breadwinners and the repositories of dreams (the lucrative 'arrangement', the movie star contract).

Meanwhile, as one might expect after their long association, the film sidles off into Merchant-Ivory-Jhabvala territory to stage little comedies of manners. With a rent collector (Kareem Samar) who benevolently expounds the social justification for accepting bribes in carrying out his duties. With a broken-down actor (Saeed Jaffrey) who lyrically expatiates on the sweet sorrow of being lured to ruin by one of these lorelei beauties. Above all with a former courtesan (Zohra Segal), now a respectable grandmother, who (all the while delivering a culinary lecture on the pickle she is preparing) describes the tradition and training that went, once upon a time, into the making of a courtesan before disco-dancing and fleshly allure became enough.

Few M-I-J films have bettered the two key moments in Zohra Segal's marvellous performance. First, when with self-deprecating amusement she demonstrates with an exquisite flirt of the eyebrow and tilt of the neck just why she was the rage of her day (thereby answering the rent collector's rhetorical question, 'Why do people go to a courtesan when you have a wife at home?'). Then the heart-stopping moment when, placidly recalling

how the eminently satisfactory 'arrangement' which brought her so much contentment with an elderly jeweller had to be made at the expense of a wayward passion for a handsome tabla player, she abruptly turns away from the camera. Only to pick up the next ingredient for her pickle, but just for a second a ghost of forgotten grief returns.

It is hereabouts that one realises the extent to which the film is less concerned with documentary than with the documentation of an aesthetic ideal based on Merchant's boyhood memories of courtesan performances. Merchant has made it none too easy for Western audiences by leaving the art of the courtesan to speak for itself against the trend expressed by Saeed Jaffrey's actor when, seemingly serving as the film's narrator but actually as its *vox populi*, he wryly notes that traditional skills are no longer in demand. So we watch the 'sad and pathetic' spectacle of clients bypassing a room in which a gaunt singer performs in classical concert style (the effect somewhat akin to a soloist with a Palm Court quartet) before moving on to crowded rooms in which performances in a variety of styles (disco, movie, semi-striptease) play to enthusiastic audiences. Then the film closes with the closing of Pavan Pool's gates for curfew, shutting in or letting out those who have come to mutually satisfactory arrangements. But what the film does not stress, except through the camera's lingering rapture, is that the last performer we see in this downbeat catalogue—the singer Shanti Bai, ageing yet still able to mesmerise through the purity of her art—lifts it into an ecstatic upbeat with the same sureness as the raga (very similar in tone and style) which so triumphantly resuscitates the past in Ray's *Jalsaghar*. □

'That has such people in't ...'

Android/Philip Strick

It's not, one has to admit, like anything else New World has done for a long, long time. The budget was tiny, but there are no signs of strain (consider, by contrast, *Avalanche* or the ghastly *Tidal Wave*). The cast—other than the familiarly vagrant Klaus Kinski—is unknown but wholly appealing. The subject is timely, but there's no trace of exploitative cynicism (as for, say, *Deathsport* or *Moonshine County Express*). One might, if forced to find fault, shave a couple of cutaway shots. The rest, praise be, is as close to just right as anyone could wish. No need to make allowances for brats fresh out of school and destined for better things, or take time to wonder if Roger Corman will ever get back to directing. With *Android* (Miracle), a real movie glows before us in bright and skilful humour.

How does it work so well? First, because it looks effortless. The special effects which have so quickly become the habitual encrustation of science fiction cinema, blurring such narrative outline as it is currently permitted, are presented in *Android* with matter-of-fact simplicity, no fuss, no grandeur, no heavy orchestration, just there. Spacecraft come and go like cars at a garage, their crews prepared to get underneath with oil and spanners when things need fixing. What took ten marvellous minutes of *2001*—the docking of the Moon-shuttle—gets casually restaged by *Android* in as many seconds so the story loses no momentum. A girl is scanned by remote-controlled cameras and briskly analysed, computerised, and televised for her 'bio-electrical potential' as one might step on bathroom scales. And when an android gets decapitated, the still-talking head (gurgling somewhat, as we have come to expect after *Alien*) contrives to be shown by a trick that Liguoro mastered for *Dante's Inferno* in 1909, needing few refinements. While it's a bit of a stretch to accept that as soon as 2036 there'll be abandoned research stations littering the galaxies, with regular police patrols passing like panda cars at comfortable intervals, *Android* constructs the future without a qualm and gets on with the consequences.

These, of course, are intended to show that times have changed but people haven't. The construction of artificial life by which, it seems, man has perpetually sought to render himself obsolete, continues at its customary pace. This year's long-haired mad scientist, closely resembling the chap in *Lifespan*, is here known as Daniel (after Asimov's mechanical detective, perhaps?) but in his similarity to Rudolph Klein-Rogge might as well be called Rotwang. The perfect woman on his laboratory slab—exhibiting, to judge from the subjective shots, some disturbing precognitive skills—has the rippling

blonde perm of Elsa Lanchester but the promise (such is progress) of a centrefold pin-up.

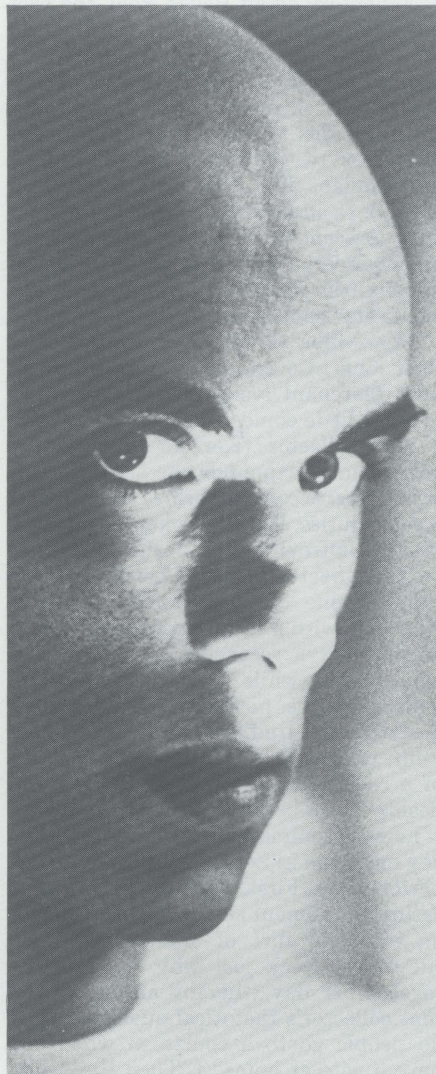
Courteously aware that we've been to the cinema before, *Android* also embraces the laser guns of Flash Gordon, the greenhouse from *Silent Running* (a nice touch, the replicant warbler), the SAS stormtrooping from *Star Wars* (even the hint of a Darth Vader mask), along with the multiple videos and indigestible meal-pastes for which Kubrick set the fashion and which *Dark Star* promptly satirised. The new slimline Robby the Robot in this fresh discovery programme is so close to human as to make See Threepio rust with envy. Max 404, the hairline of his wig almost invisible, the eager toddle of his gait as ingratiating as a Keaton shuffle, is eager as Mary Shelley's Creature to be accepted into the Promised Land of common humanity, and—thanks to technology and plenty of video homework—much more likely than Frankenstein's luckless

outcast to pass unnoticed in a crowd.

Directed by Aaron Lipstadt, of excellent pedigree (second-unit director on a number of New World productions, his initial training was by our own Peter Wollen, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Paddy Whannel), *Android* is nevertheless clearly centred on the skills of Don Oppen, who part-scripted the film and makes of Max 404 an ingenuous facsimile so charmingly awkward that one might almost believe the film's amiable suggestion in its opening credits that he was constructed specially for the role. Anxious as his creator to make an impression on the opposite sex, he studies *It's a Wonderful Life* for clues, relieved to find that James Stewart is as clumsy as any android when confronting Donna Reed. He adopts the talisman of 1940s Hollywood, the Bogart hat, and clutches it for reassurance, a floppy passport, in all times of stress.

It's a happy thought that future students of this planet might look to Capra for guidance rather than, say, to Bert Gordon or Edward D. Wood Jr, although I doubt they'll be so lucky. What's even happier is that when Max is programmed to kill by his unscrupulous inventor he marches wigless to the fray with his ears at an angle, looking just like Klaus Kinski in Herzog's *Nosferatu*, while the reflex with which he catches a hurled weapon in midair and chucks it easily aside with such force that it sticks shuddering in the wall, conveys a genuine and shocking sense of the unhuman. His preparations for the anticipated journey to Earth are a special pleasure; into the suitcase go a spare eyeball, a set of fingers, an arm, and two small, uncompleted android dolls that are his own work in progress.

Max's dolls have already taken on an intriguing independence behind the film's opening credits; later he manipulates them to externalise his potential relationship with the girl who, with two other fugitives, has turned to him for help ('Max, you're a doll,' she whispers with a hug). Lipstadt has described how *Android* illustrates that a business corporation (the inventor) might ultimately have the power to create an ideal work force (Max and his female counterpart, Cassandra) over which it could maintain total control—the sort of concern which yet again brings Kinski to mind, as the corporation megaboss in Toback's *Love and Money*, or more uneasily Hume Cronyn and the financial politics of Pakula's *Rollover*. But in fact Max's private experiments in design point to a quite opposite forecast; as each new android made in its designer's image sets industriously about the construction of a further generation, a mechanised work force would quickly exist that would be beyond the control not only of any corporation but also of the human race in general. And if Lipstadt's delightful parable is any indication, life will then proceed with every appearance of normality. □



The android (Don Oppen).

BOOK REVIEWS

Surviving

INDECENT EXPOSURE

by David McClintick
Columbus Books/£10.95

In the early 70s, in the wake of such box-office failures as *Lost Horizon* and *Young Winston*, Columbia Pictures was on the verge of bankruptcy. Salvation appeared in the shape of the New York investment house of Allen and Company, who purchased the studio in 1973. They appointed as President of the company Alan Hirschfield, formerly an investment banker with Allen and Company, and as the Los Angeles-based head of production David Begelman, a leading Hollywood agent and packager of films. In just four years, the studio was flush. Its balance sheet was healthy and profits from distribution were flowing in. Hirschfield and Begelman could congratulate themselves not only on rescuing the studio from financial ruin (a \$50 million loss had been declared for fiscal year 1973), but also on generating the highest profits in Columbia's history. Ironically, it was at this peak of Begelman's glory, just before the opening of Columbia's greatest triumph, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, that the studio was plunged into a scandal which rocked Hollywood.

In February 1977, actor Cliff Robertson discovered that a cheque for \$10,000 made out to him by Columbia Pictures had been forged and cashed by Begelman. Confronted with this, Begelman, in true Hollywood style, swore—'on the life of my child'—that he had done nothing wrong. Subsequent investigation revealed the existence of other forged cheques, including one to director Martin Ritt, plus other expense-account irregularities. Since Columbia Pictures was a public company, subject to scrutiny by the Securities and Exchange Commission, some action was required. President Alan Hirschfield assumed that, at Columbia as in almost any major public corporation, the discovery of forgery and embezzlement by a senior executive would lead to his dismissal. But in this he underestimated not only Hollywood's support for one of its own, but also the reluctance of the Columbia Board to lose Begelman, the man whom they regarded as the saviour of their company.

In *Indecent Exposure*, journalist David McClintick performs a stunning feat in unravelling the consequences of the discovery of the forged cheques. He skilfully documents the dramatic shift from Los Angeles to the New York boardroom of Columbia,



David Begelman.

where the major power struggle is enacted between, on one hand, Alan Hirschfield, and on the other, Herbert Allen Jnr and the Board of Columbia Pictures. So exciting is the story that it is unconsciously tantalising that McClintick unwittingly sabotages it by losing himself in a kind of epistemological chaos. The root of the problem is his claim, expressed in the Author's Note, that 'Everything in this book is real—every episode, scene, weather reference, conversation and name.' Yet, given the notorious unreliability of memory, how can McClintick seriously expect us to accept the accuracy of the conversations of which the text is largely composed? Unless the Columbia boardroom was bugged in Oval Office style, how can he guarantee the authenticity of the frequently lengthy exchanges which took place there?

Investigative reporter McClintick, in his tireless pursuit of 'the real', even penetrates the minds of his principals. On p 42, Cliff Robertson thinks that 'the man's gall is beyond all imagining', while on p 45, 'Caressed by Muzak, Begelman sat at his elaborate faux marble desk and thought about the check and about Cliff Robertson... One thing was certainly clear. Using Robertson's name to steal the money in the first place had been a big mistake, even though it had seemed perfectly logical at the time.' What McClintick has produced is a work of faction, not fact. Although he purports to give us 'the real', what he has done is to transform real people into pseudo-fictional characters, reinforced by 'real' (i.e. verifiable) facts like his relentless use of the daily records of the National Weather Service.

Since this novelettish style demands a hero, McClintick selects for the role Alan Hirschfield, who is described (unlike the selected villains, Begelman and Herbert Allen Jnr) in fulsome terms, just a little short of idolatry. 'He was an attractive man—a six-footer of medium build with an athletic bearing, hair that was expertly coiffed even though thinning and greying, and

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BOOK REVIEWS

a countenance that revealed his droll, playful personality through twinkling eyes and the trace of a smile.' But McClintick's attempt to project Hirschfield as moral champion rests on shaky ground. It was Hirschfield, after all, who appointed as head of Columbia Records Clive Davis, who had been fired from his job as head of CBS Records for misappropriation of funds, and who at that time was under federal investigation for tax evasion. Had Hirschfield the moral strength with which McClintick wishes to invest him, why didn't he resign over the Columbia Board's decision to reinstate Begelman? It is hard to resist the conclusion reached by a Columbia senior vice-president, Allen Adler, that Hirschfield's major motivation was saving his job. Equally, how can one dispute Herbert Allen Jnr's contention that Hirschfield's attempt to persuade Sir James Goldsmith to buy Columbia, without prior consultation with the Board, was duplicitous?

Curiously myopic where Hirschfield is involved, McClintick fails to recognise the nature of the power struggle between Hirschfield and Allen. Although Hirschfield was convinced of his superior powers of intellect and business acumen, he consistently failed to acknowledge Allen's fundamental advantage in their conflict—that Allen was the employer and Hirschfield the employee. In addition, given the traditional film industry dichotomy between the East and West Coast, with the East supplying the money and the West the talent and the ideas, Hirschfield never had the bargaining power of either Begelman or producer Ray Stark, who had both successfully supplied the East Coast with what they lacked—the ability to make successful movies. Throughout *Indecent Exposure*, McClintick betrays his (East Coast?) prejudice against Los Angeles, presenting it as the natural home of shady deals and hypocrisy. Begelman's lunch invitation to Cliff Robertson is described as 'an

entirely phony gesture of friendship so typical of Hollywood in general... Only in Hollywood will an agent betray a client one year and cozy up to him the next as if nothing had happened.' Really? It is hard to imagine that such practices belong uniquely to Hollywood.

In fact, *Indecent Exposure* fails to tell us very much about Hollywood. What does emerge is a frightening image of the workings of capitalism in the boardrooms of Wall Street. The captains of American industry as represented on the Columbia Board appear highly emotional, overwrought men whose decisions are dictated by expediency rather than by intellect or morality. (Many of the principals here collapse in hysterical weeping fits with alarming regularity.)

The book concludes with what might appear a typical Hollywood ending. Finally dismissed by Columbia, both Begelman and Hirschfield find re-employment, the former as President of MGM-UA, and the latter as Chief Executive of Twentieth Century-Fox. In reality, fate had an ironic twist in store for David Begelman. The great talent for packaging films, for which the Columbia Board fought to retain him, seemed to desert him during his presidency of MGM-UA, from which he was ultimately fired after producing a series of failures, including *Cannery Row*, *Pennies from Heaven* and *Buddy, Buddy*.

With rather offensive bombast, McClintick calls the whole affair a 'holocaust of controversy and pain'. Undeniably, Hollywood, always watchful of its reputation, was severely traumatised by the affair and the press coverage it received. Now, Columbia Pictures' accounting system has been rigorously tightened, and Hollywood life continues as before. *Indecent Exposure* is sufficiently gripping to prove that a great book could be written about Hollywood and the front office. Sadly, David McClintick has not written it.

LYNDA MYLES

So near but...

STRANGERS IN PARADISE

The Hollywood Emigrés, 1933-1950

by John Russell Taylor

Faber and Faber/£8.25

Faber's sedate black cover is peculiarly inappropriate for *Strangers in Paradise*. For one thing, the outer trappings hardly chime with John Russell Taylor's light-fingered approach to film history. For another, the sombre colour clashes with the gaudy confusions that émigrés experienced under the Californian sun; blackness was what many Europeans were in America to escape from, though at the end of Taylor's period—1933 to 1950—some shadows returned via the Un-American Activities Committee. Not all, however, were political refugees from Hitler. Some, like Otto Preminger, switched continents primarily to further their careers; some, like Ronald Colman, had settled into profitable niches years before. Yet for whatever reason there they were, clustered in California with various accents, reputations and social habits—high-class immigrants in a country swelled by foreign invasions in the late nineteenth century, toying with an industry largely established by immigrant entrepreneurs.

This was a time when it was theoretically possible to organise ludicrous doubles matches on the tennis court: Sir C. Aubrey Smith and Bertolt Brecht, perhaps, playing against S. Z. ('Cuddles') Sakall and René Clair, with Thomas Mann as umpire. Yet in sprawling Los Angeles—'the easiest place in the world to disappear in,' according to Taylor—each émigré tended to keep to his own kind, and this dream match must remain a dream. Aubrey Smith would never be prized from the Hollywood Cricket Club, *The Times* or the script of *The White Cliffs of Dover*. Brecht, who spread his wings more than most, would be locked in creative argument over projects with Lion Feuchtwanger (*The Visions of Simone Machard*), Charles Laughton (*Galileo*) or the composer Hanns Eisler. Clair would be keeping in touch with compatriots and francophiles like Preston Sturges (who paved the way for *I Married a Witch*). Thomas Mann would be out lecturing or deep in the manuscript of *Joseph the Provider* or *Doctor Faustus* (the latter prompting tetchy public exchanges with his fellow-émigré Arnold Schoenberg). Taylor gives no clue

to S. Z. Sakall's activities; tennis, perhaps?

The émigré's social framework, in fact, looms larger in the book than any concrete cinematic achievement. Austro-German contributions to the *film noir* trend (Lang, Siodmak, Wilder, Preminger, John Brahm) are rightly identified, but many of Taylor's subjects spent Hollywood's time and money twiddling their thumbs—fulfilling contracts that were often little more than sinecures fixed through philanthropic organisations like the European Film Fund. Alfred Döblin, author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, was given a one-year contract at MGM and advised the adoption of a Chaplinesque style for *Mrs Miniver*; the suggestion, clearly, was not pursued. Buñuel, at Warner Brothers, conceived the grotesque perambulations of the severed hand in *The Beast with Five Fingers*. Schoenberg mulled over the prospect of being musical adviser for a Warners biography of Beethoven.

Such esoteric titbits make pleasant reading, yet the lack of any rigorous confrontation with the artistic outcome of these years in paradise ultimately causes difficulties. We step through the author's paragraphs gratefully acquiring strange facts, savouring the political ironies and the personalities (Hugh Walpole particularly, dreaming in his journal of nourishing British food: 'an English breakfast—kippers, fat sausages bursting their skins, fishcakes, kedgeree. For lunch, trout and marmalade pudding'). We need, however, a controlling argument, a perspective; we need, above all, ballast. The book's literary manner contributes to its flimsy weight: urbane adverbs and phrases—anyway, really, of course, actually, after all—become so overworked that they threaten to erode the sentences. The information diligently marshalled (there is a three-page bibliography) is also dispensed with occasional careless ease. 'Something called *Burn Witch Burn*' (a project Hugh Walpole imperiously refused to write) is no wild unknown but the novel finally—and famously—filmed by Tod Browning as *The Devil Doll*; this may not be a colossal error, but the imprecision is symptomatic.

The problem, ultimately, is one of pitch. *Strangers in Paradise* eschews the intellectual rigours necessary to draw out the deeper aesthetic consequences of life in exile, yet it also lacks the vivid impact—and the illustrations—of a popular, chatty history (such as John Baxter's *The Hollywood Exiles*). It remains, at least, a handy survey of an inexhaustible subject, and the image of Hugh Walpole fondly contemplating marmalade pud remains indelible.

GEOFF BROWN

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LETTERS

Manila

SIR,—It used to be a commonplace for magazines to carry a caveat that certain information is 'correct at the time of going to press'. In the case of your report of the Manila International Film Festival ('Double Takes', SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1983), this would clearly be unnecessary. Most of the 'information' it contains would be inaccurate at any time.

It is largely 'disinformation' of a kind familiar in other parts of the media with a vested interest in attacking the Philippines Government with whatever weapon comes to hand—in your case, a film festival. But the fact that SIGHT AND SOUND now entertains a pseudonymous columnist whose principal aim is to 'smear' is particularly impermissible. It is not the brief of a publicly funded periodical like yours to grant space to those intent on writing into 'the record' a hostile political polemic. Such 'facts' as it records are inaccurate or incomplete, or both, and, unless corrected, will associate the British Film Institute with an attempt to mislead and discredit.

To be specific: Whether or not what your columnist calls 'the Marcos regime' is 'repressive' is a matter of opinion. That kind of opinion, though, has no place in your magazine. I note that the current *BFI News* manages to write of members of the BFI distribution and programming staff visiting the Soviet Union this year and last without feeling the need to comment on the 'regime' they found there. This is as it should be: otherwise the BFI will be brought into the contentious politics of a larger sphere than its own working—and goodness knows, that is contentious enough—and its stature and usefulness will suffer certain injury.

Secondly, the report on Manila is wrong in its details. The 'Festival Centre' (sic: I suppose the 'Film Centre', home of the national film archive as well as year-round film seasons) did not collapse last year. A portion of the sixth floor gave way in the sort of industrial accident sadly common to building projects anywhere in the world. 'Scores of workmen' were not killed: but that *even one* should have been is cause for compassion, not indictment. Thirdly, what has a French tv programme on child prostitution to do with the Manila festival and its guests? Using a social abuse featured in a programme whose own credentials are in question shows your columnist's willingness to reach for any dirt in the hope of making it stick by association to the Manila event.

The points that actually refer to the festival appear to come from inaccurate hearsay, specula-

tive trade press reports or, as is much the easier course, your writer's own invention.

Yes, *Britannia Hospital* was shown. Why should it not have been? It was included among the 100-odd films in the Information Section: an outstanding British film unlikely to be seen soon in Manila. The fact that only last April did it get its first screening in a country as near to hand as Hungary shows that Manila need not blush over your columnist's fear that its 'shelf life' was exhausted. Manila was not short of titles. On the contrary, it was embarrassed by the numbers of eligible competitive and other entries, swollen by the last-minute 'surprise' film *Fanny and Alexander*, which Jörn Donner himself brought to Manila and saw it given a gala screening. We also had the first screening (I believe) outside France of Wajda's *Danton*. From Britain alone we had three co-productions sent by Channel 4 and very well received; *Five Days One Summer* sent by Fred Zinnemann with his blessing; an Olivier retrospective prefaced by a 15-minute film which Lord Olivier spent a half-day shooting in London specially for Manila; and, of course, *Gandhi* as the climax to the event.

Your columnist's querying of the British guests' motives for going—sun, freeloading, etc—is both unworthy and meaningless. The same innuendoes could be levelled at any large festival anywhere, and no doubt have and will be again.

The budget quoted of \$1.38 million is not correct. No one knew what the festival would cost in advance, because the festival took the bold gamble of pinning its solvency on the receipts from public cinemas where paying audiences saw films without the hindrance of censorship. The gamble paid off handsomely, if controversially. For the record, it covered the festival's final cost of about £1 million; fees to the film trade of about £1.3 million; and donations to hospitals, welfare and charitable organisations of some £1 million. This may not be the European way of doing things at cultural events: maybe it should be—maybe it will have to be.

The films so shown were not 'mainstream Hollywood to hard porn'. A few of the Filipino-made films contained scenes of nudity or simulated copulation which would each pass censorship here and be popularly called 'soft porn'. The foreign films were led by Oshima's *Realm of the Senses*, Pasolini's *Canterbury Tales* and *1,001 Nights* and Fassbinder's *Querelle*. Their commercial success was undoubtedly helped by the suspension of Manila's customary censorship—but would you and your readers not wish

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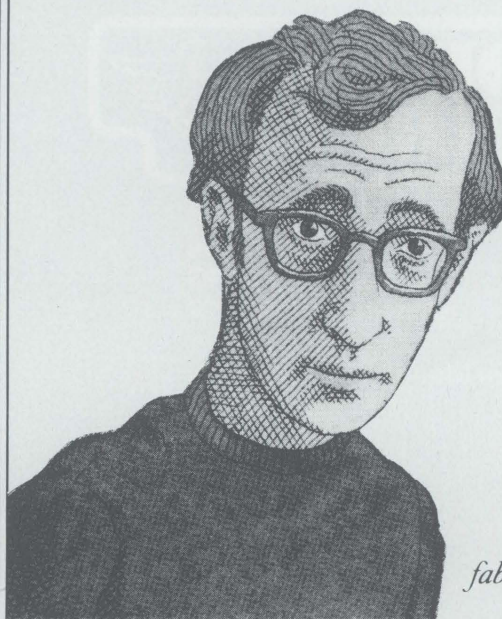
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LETTERS

this to be so? You cannot have it both ways.

To turn to the jury: Carl Foreman was *not* a member of it. Those who were, in addition to the names mentioned, included the directors of the Taormina and San Sebastian film festivals, the critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, the head of Hungarofilm and distinguished Filipino and other Asian film-makers. These people are not political simpletons: they clearly approved of the film festival and it is disingenuous of your columnist to reprove them for what they did not feel and then to go on to exculpate Sir Richard Attenborough and Ben Kingsley for attending because of 'so much riding on the success of *Gandhi*' that 'they simply *had* to attend.' This makes Sir Richard and Mr Kingsley out to be reactionary or craven or just plain dumb. *Gandhi* did *not* need Manila, though Manila's stature was justly enhanced by the welcome it gave *Gandhi* and distinguished guests like these two who took the trouble to attend, unlike your columnist who stayed at home and cribbed whatever would serve his purpose to 'crab' Manila.

Let me add a final comment. You should not conceal from your readers the fact that SIGHT AND SOUND, too, had its representative

in Manila. This writer, who identified himself with opposition to Manila in 1982, nevertheless accepted an invitation this year which included a round-trip ticket, accommodation and hospitality costing in all about \$3,800. Although not at Manila solely for SIGHT AND SOUND, your readers would surely have been interested to hear from him about the new Filipino films made under the auspices of the festival's sponsoring body, three of which by common consent represent a great advance in the country's growing cinema sophistication. Nothing from him appeared in your magazine. Instead, it has published the damaging misrepresentations of a politically motivated stay-at-home who conceals his prejudices from any closer scrutiny of their origins by using the cover of a pseudonym.

Yours faithfully,
ALEXANDER WALKER
British Delegate, MIFF

ALMEREIDA writes: The question of political repression is of concern to critics, whether in cinema or literature, everywhere. Given the absolute benefit of the doubt the Marcos regime could be described as a supreme example of nepotism in action. Whether Mr Walker gives credence to the

'official' figures on the injuries resulting from a 'sadly common' building accident is a matter for his own conscience and credulity to judge. The screening of *Britannia Hospital* at Manila was the cause of some amusement within the corridors of EMI. In the period before the festival, 'product shortage', as the trade curiously describes it, was a matter of frequent comment. So too—among those attending *and* those not—was the freeloading associated with the festival. Mr Walker's comments on the precise detail of MIFF's financial operation seem to bear out, better than anything I could add, the comments made in the original article. As for censorship, I am not suggesting that *we* have it both ways—merely commenting that the Marcos family are willing to do so, despite their normally inflexible position on matters of morality, national duty, and so on. I apologise for incorrectly listing Carl Foreman as a member of the festival jury. But to all these comments, many of which are in effect quibbles, there is surely one simple reply: since when has a member of the liberal British press felt that he could foster or promote an event such as MIFF, in print and in person, and at the same time retain the essential impartiality of the critic?

Yol

SIR,—I found your review of *Yol*, 'Besmirched Honour' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1983), most unfair. It may or may not be true that *Yol* is popular because it reinforced Western prejudices of the East, but is that the film's fault? And has your review done anything to alleviate the situation? Indeed I think it does much to confuse matters further. Everything in the film that is distinctly Turkish the writer, Jill Forbes, either ignores or falsifies.

The review itself is an example of cultural imperialism. You should show more respect for people you obviously know very little about. The writer imposes her values where they do not belong. For example: 'They [Mehmet and Emine] are denounced, hauled before the travel police and publicly humiliated.' This is simply not the case. The couple hide in the toilet until the police arrive to save them from the crowd's wrath. Their humiliation begins the moment they are discovered, and the police intervene to restore order and to try to administer some sort of justice.

Further: '... just as they finally succeed in convincing an official that they are, indeed, married and that public morality has not been offended ...' They do not try to persuade the official that their behaviour has not been offensive. This is what a Westerner would

try to do. They accept the judgment of the crowd and beg for mercy, pleading numerous mitigating circumstances, their marriage, their children, recent hardships and their long separation. This is what Orientals do.

And further: '... they fall victims to the private vendetta'. The vendetta is not 'private'. The concept of privacy is Western. Mehmet has broken the code, and Emine's brother administers the justice. This is how Mehmet himself would see it, although he would cry and beg for mercy just as he does in the film. He knows that he has lost his honour. In writing about an alien culture, your reviewer should first accept the fact of its alienness, instead of mixing observation and moralising. The two don't go well together.

Yours faithfully,
AHMED MANSOON
Penzance

JILL FORBES writes: It is interesting that Ahmed Mansoon's reading of the scenes involving Mehmet and Emine should be so different from mine. But I think this confirms the point I was trying to make, namely that it is extremely difficult to divest oneself of received views about an 'alien culture' and that *Yol* gave me little help in this respect. I don't accept the charge of 'cultural imperialism': I try to criticise the 'patriarchal order' whether I find it at home or abroad. On the other hand, if everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds in Turkey, why is Yilmaz Güney in exile?

HDTV

SIR,—So the Japanese have lighted upon 5:3 (1.66:1) as an ideal picture size or aspect ratio. This is almost exactly the same as the Golden Section of the Renaissance, which proposed a ratio of height to width equal to the ratio of width to height + width, working out at about 1.62:1.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT CAMPLIN
Staines

Missing Hitchcocks

SIR,—It seems you have checked on the illicit screenings of Hitchcock films in Berlin. But your informant is mistaken. In fact, *Vertigo* and *Rear Window* were shown by an independent exhibitor at the 1982 Berlin festival (and many times before and after that occasion). I saw both films there myself and I am positive that neither was shown in black and white or in a dubbed version; the prints were original versions in colour—but, alas, 16mm! Nevertheless, seeing those 'missing Hitchcocks' in a double

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feature, both for the first time and aware of the illicit nature of the showing, was a feast I shall never forget.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT FISCHER
Munich

Universal has in the last few months acquired rights to the five famous 'missing Hitchcocks' and they should soon be getting a release. This correspondence is now closed.—EDITOR

Local Hero

SIR,—Having read the review of *Local Hero* in SIGHT AND SOUND (Spring 1983), I feel compelled to comment on Nick Roddick's inaccuracy, at a moment in which, if his review is to be seriously considered, he should have been precise in his story plot. By the end of the ceilidh, Ben has already been introduced and established in his shack and is seen in the kitchen (during the ceilidh sequence) stuffing food into his pockets. The reason 'we shift rather abruptly outside' is not the introduction of Ben, but the

aurora borealis which results in Harper's sudden appearance in Ferness village.

Yours faithfully,
PAT RAMBAUT
Script Continuity Girl,
Local Hero
London NW3

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BROSAN is the author of *Movie Magic, the Story of Special Effects in the Cinema* and *Future Tense, the Cinema of Science Fiction* ... JOHN BROWN is Assistant Director of the Scottish Film Council ... IAN CHRISTIE is Head of Programming in the BFI's Distribution Division ... RICHARD MAYNE is a writer and broadcaster whose latest book is *Postwar*; he was formerly special adviser to the Commission of the European Communities ... VLADA PETRIC is Curator of the Harvard Film Archive ... MICHAEL PILSWORTH is a producer in the Features Department at LWT ... TERRENCE RAFFERTY is a freelance writer based in New York who works for Doubleday.

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UIP for *New York, New York*, *The Last Waltz*, *The Bed Sitting Room*, *Flashdance*.
VIRGIN FILMS for *The Ploughman's Lunch*.
ARTIFICIAL EYE for *L'Argent*, *Passion*, *One Man's War*.
MIRACLE for *Android*.
PALACE PICTURES for *Merry Christmas*, *Mr Lawrence*.
THORN-EMI for *Slayground*, photograph of Verity Lambert.
BLUEBIRD MOVIE ENTERPRISE PRODUCTIONS for *The Boat People*.
COLIN GREGG FILM PRODUCTIONS (Glenn Ratcliffe) for *To the Lighthouse*.
LES FILMS DU LOSANGE for *Pauline à la Plage*.
VIDES/GAUMONT/RAI for *E la Nave Va*.
FILM FOR THOUGHT/NEW YORK-HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION for *Before the Nickelodeon*.
PHILIPPE DUSSART PRODUCTIONS/SOPROFILMS/FILMS A2/FIDELINE FILMS/LES FILMS ARIANE/FILMEDIS for *La Vie est un Roman*.
ELIAS QUEREJETA (Spain)/CHLOE PRODUCTIONS (France) for *The South*.
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HOLMES AND ASSOCIATES for *Well Being*.
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ON NOW

●ASPERN

(Connoisseur)

In his third film, an adaptation of Henry James' tale of hunt-the-literary-thimble, Eduardo de Gregorio more or less finds his way back to his first, *Serail*. Again the setting is an isolated, rambling villa—though not so much of the Old Dark House this time—inhabited by three women of whom the hero hopes to take advantage, only to find that they too have their eye on the main chance. Despite updating to the present and relocating from Venice to Lisbon, *Aspern* is surprisingly faithful to James, even while pursuing its own concerns (shades of Bertolucci and Rivette here) about trails that lead nowhere and fictions that come to ashes. (Bulle Ogier, Jean Sorel, Alida Valli.)

●HANDGUN

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

In his second film as director, Tony Garnett throws himself with a will into the world of present-day Texas gunmen, just as, in his first, he threw himself into the predominantly downmarket world of the British prostitute. (One moral of both films is that 'they' are not nearly so far removed from 'us' as we might, with false comfort, have believed.) In *Handgun*, however, which benefits from a foreigner's viewpoint, Garnett meshes fact and fiction to greater effect than in *Prostitute*. His sense of outrage is just as plain, and works chiefly because it is not dressed up. A delicate Boston Irish teacher (a whole-hearted first performance by Karen Young) is casually raped by a purebred Texas lawyer who, because he has lectured her history class on 'Judge Colt and his Jury of Six', assumes he has a right to the body of this clueless uninformed girl. The rape sequence is terrifying but no more so than the Texan's cool blockheaded self-assurance. The girl, in the end, proves herself decisively the better man. (Clayton Day.)

●MONTY PYTHON'S THE MEANING OF LIFE

(HandMade)

Its detractors remark sniffily that some people never grow out of schoolboy jokes, that it's just more of the same and, in any event, it was all far better in the good old days. The fact remains, however, that the old firm is holding its audience, especially overseas (see the Cannes Special Jury Prize), and has not mellowed with fame: they are, if anything, ruder, more anarchic, more inventive now the shackles of television are off. Like Mel Brooks, they are now sufficiently

successful to be able to operate on a hit-or-miss basis: if a skit dies, pass hastily on to the next. Also like Brooks, whose driving energy they share, they are developing a taste, it appears, for gargantuan production numbers. In *The Meaning of Life*, they bring off two—a pastiche of *Oliver!*, featuring an immense Roman Catholic family from deepest Lancashire, and a restaurant scene beside which *La Grande Bouffe* seems a genteel picnic—with triumphant indecency. (Director, Terry Jones.)

●PARSIFAL

(Artificial Eye)

There is something exasperating about the way Herzog and Syberberg together have cannibalised, with arch-German thoroughness, the politico-cultural myths of their native country (a process which will no doubt culminate in an even Stephen division of Goethe's *Faust*, Part I for Herzog, Part II for Syberberg). That said, the latter's *Parsifal*, ungrateful material for a cinematic adaptation if ever there was, represents a genuinely innovative approach to the filming of opera. To be sure, the vast sound stage on which the drama unfolds (in and around a death-mask of Wagner enlarged to Mount Rushmore dimensions) is complacently strewn with catch-all Syberbergian bric-à-brac; and the Flower Maidens are nothing short of catastrophic, suggesting less Bayreuth than Raymond's Revuebar. The film's real strength and originality derive from Syberberg's wilfully formalist assumption, and subversion, of the playback effect, the splitting of acting and singing, voices, lips and larynxes, as exemplified by the haunting substitution, at the moment of his rejection of Kundry, of a female Parsifal—thereby investing the *heldentenor* voice of Reiner Goldberg with resonances that, like those of the film as a whole, both conform to and transcend Wagnerian conventions. (Edith Clever, Michael Kutter, Karin Krick.)

●THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

(UIP)

Peter Weir's films have always struggled to combine a personal crisis with a wider concern. In this partly true story of an Australian foreign correspondent caught up in the events which led to the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia, he brings it all off with a rare accomplishment, balancing action set-pieces like the events of 30 September 1965 against an old-style Hollywood romance (between correspondent Mel Gibson and British consular official Sigourney Weaver). Weir challenges contemporary sensibilities, but does so with sufficient skill and brio that even the *Casablanca*-style ending is somehow integrated. His most audacious device, though, is the use of the diminutive Chinese-Australian cameraman Billie Kwan (played by an American actress, Linda Hunt) as a guide to Oriental values and the spiritual themes which have always underpinned Weir's movies, but which here form a crucial context for the more obvious realistic action.

BARBAROSA

(Blue Dolphin)

Any Western is welcome in the dearth that followed the murder of *Heaven's Gate*. But this one, directed with the same alertness to landscape that Fred Schepisi showed in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, is an uncommonly intelligent reworking of the blood feud theme as a conscious exploration of the function (and functioning) of myth. (Willie Nelson, Gary Busey, Gilbert Roland.)

BEST FRIENDS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

The return of the Hollywood comedy, built around knowing star performances by Burt Reynolds and Goldie Hawn. The screenplay by husband and wife Barry (*Diner*) Levinson and Valerie Curtin shows how marriage can all but kill a relationship. Of course it doesn't, but the road to resolution is strewn with nice gags. (Director, Norman Jewison.)

CONFIDENCE

(Cinegate)

István Szabó's impeccable chamber drama, made before *Mephisto*. Familiar in theme (two fugitives forced to live together as man and wife during the Nazi occupation), but orchestrated with brilliant subtlety as the contradictory impulses of fear and need breach all defences. (Ildikó Bászai, Péter Andorai.)

EDUCATING RITA

(Rank)

Willy Russell's adaptation of his neo-Pygmalion stage two-hander, quite affecting—thanks primarily to Julie Walters and Michael Caine—in its central sentimental relationship, but laborious when it seeks to amplify the social context. (Director, Lewis Gilbert.)

HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

The indestructible maniac evidently did die at the end of *Halloween II*. Now a mad scientist plots fiendish doom for America's children by way of boobytrapped Halloween masks. No change in the way this new look sequel actually looks or functions, but it is quite fun. (Tom Atkins, Stacey Nelkin, Dan O'Herlihy; director, Tommy Lee Wallace.)

HONKYTONK MAN

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Clint Eastwood, marking time, plays a country singer meandering through the depressed South, heading for Nashville for a last shot at fame. Son Kyle is in tow, picking up the lore, observing the ways of superstardom. TV strikes the great performer down on stage. (Director, Clint Eastwood.)

THE HUNGER

(UIP)

Stylistically somewhere between a pretentious TV commercial and a rock video, Tony Scott's vampire movie is wearily hand-me-down (David Bowie and Catherine Deneuve needing succulent young victims to feed their desire for immortality). The mixture of blood-letting and softcore sex

seems to be its own justification, hence the disappearance, halfway through, of Bowie, which could scuttle the film at the box-office.

ONE FROM THE HEART

(Artificial Eye)

Another Francis Coppola film that became a legend-in-the-making: after the location rigours of *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola bought and refurbished his own studio, Zoetrope, as a temple to the new electronic cinema, only to be struck again by soaring production costs in his own backyard. Electronics in the event have swamped a slight and old-fashioned fantasy, in which light and colour have been dazzlingly stylised and characters, music and choreography left to go their graceless way. (Frederic Forrest, Teri Garr, Nastassia Kinski, Raul Julia.)

PIXOTE

(Palace Pictures)

Street urchin Pixote (Fernando Ramos da Silva) survives a brutalising reform school to graduate to big-time crime. Hector Babenco's purported exposé of one of Brazil's most pressing social problems relies more on traditional sex 'n' violence sensationalism than on social realist conventions to make its point. (Jorge Juliao, Marília Pêra.)

THE RISE TO POWER OF LOUIS XIV

(Connoisseur)

Arriving in British distribution 17 years on, Rossellini's film is revealed as a demanding but fascinating attempt to come to terms with historical process. Setting up a dialectic between the supposed reconstruction of events and a refusal to dramatise them, it puts distanciation to provocative effect. (Jean-Marie Patte, Raymond Jourdan.)

TENEBRAE

(Anglo-American)

A 'slasher' is abroad and a succession of lightly clad young women are despatched before the psychopath turns out to be... who one suspected. Dario Argento enthusiastically botches the plot, but pulls off a Grand Guignol finale which makes one regret, for a moment, that there had not been less freneticism and more method. (Anthony Franciosa, Daria Nicolodi, John Saxon.)

THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

(Cannon)

Supposed satire of macho mystiques (actually celebrated in a glow of nostalgia) as nasty home truths surface during a reunion commemorating a basketball team's famous victory. Turgidly theatrical, and achieving the distinction of getting a bad performance out of Robert Mitchum. (Bruce Dern, Stacy Keach, Martin Sheen; director, Jason Miller.)

WITHOUT A TRACE

(Fox)

Mother under stress when, with hubby already defecting, her child vanishes without trace. Made with one eye on the understatement of *Ordinary People*, but unable to resist piling on the gush. (Kate Nelligan, Judd Hirsch; director, Stanley R. Jaffe.)

THE NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL

Takes pleasure in its first British Academy award for

DREAMLAND EXPRESS

by David Anderson (best animated short film)

and congratulates the NFFC for

THE PRIVILEGE

written and directed by NFTS graduate Ian Knox (best short film)

and to Diane Tammes for her share in

POLICE

BBC (best factual series)

*and looks forward to the success of their students whose
films were recently screened at BAFTA.*

Directors: John Davis, Pierre-Do Godts, Dennis De Groot, Cavan Greenwood
Ann Foreman, Harry Hook, Steve Gough, Timothy Ollive

Cameramen: Martin Fuhrer, Gabriel Beristain

‘If you were looking for some reassurance in the past week about the survival of talent within British television drama, the place to be was not at home in front of the set but at the Spring graduate screenings of the National Film & Television School—they were of such a high standard that one’s faith was re-invigorated—with all the strength of a born-again Christian.’

Chris Dunkley, Financial Times.



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